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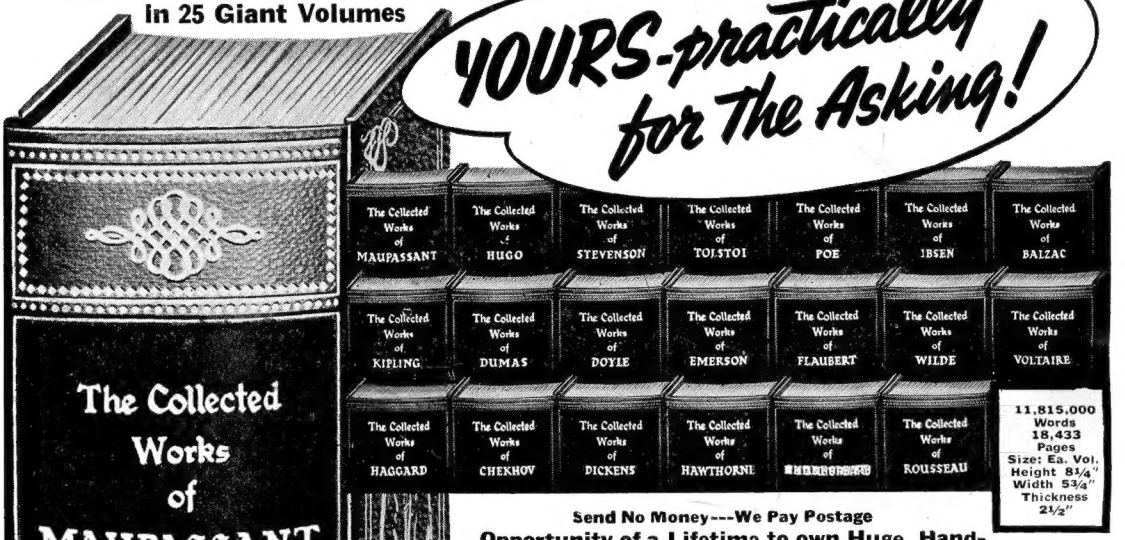
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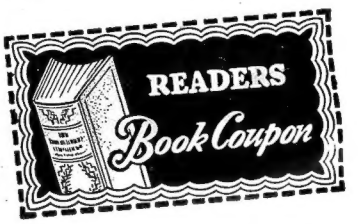

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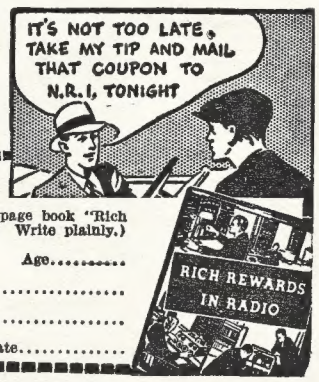

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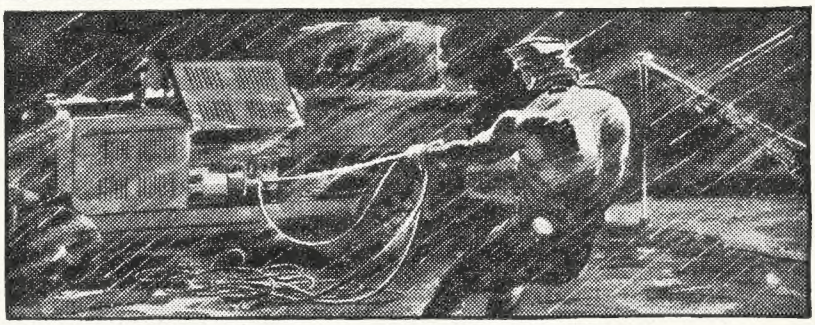

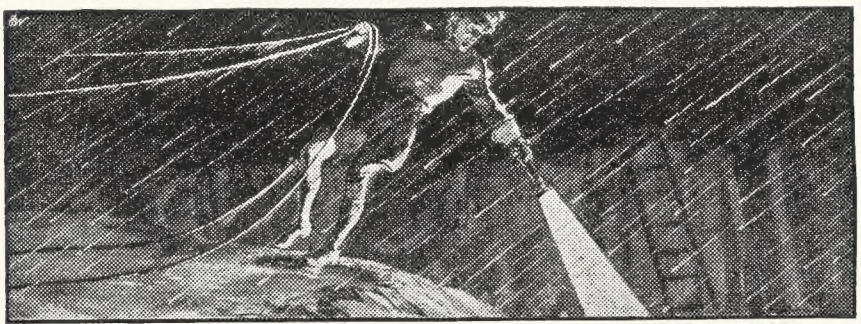

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Vol. 103, No. 5 for September, 1940 Best of New Stories

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Cover by Stockton Mulford

Headings by Hamilton Greene, I. B. Hazelton and Peter Kuhlhoff

Howard V. L. Bloomfield, Editor

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LOST TRAILS

NOTE: We offer this department to readers who wish to get in touch again with friends or acquaintances separated by years or chance. Give your own name and full address. Please notify *Adventure* immediately should you establish contact with the person you are seeking. Space permitting, each inquiry addressed to Lost Trails will be run in three consecutive issues. Requests by and for women are declined, as not considered effective in a magazine published for men. *Adventure* also will decline any notice that may not seem a sincere effort to recover an old friendship, or for any other reason in the judgment of the editorial staff. No charge is made for publication of notices.

Clayton Isabel and Red Lewis, write me at once—Bill LaRue, Parrottsville, Tenn.

Would like to hear from Kenneth Sublette, Robert Livingston, Ben Covington, the Gorman Brothers, or anyone from Lytton Springs, 1914-15; also Fuzzy Bell, Carl McLain, Eldredge Metzger or anyone from George Jr. Republic, Chino, Cal. Also anyone from the 15th Regiment Guard Co. (aviation) 1920. "Soapy" Leonard was the company commander. Sheppard was the "C O". Jimmy Tarpley, 1530 Victory Blvd., Glendale, Cal.

I should like to contact any of the translators who served with me in the Bureau of Naval Intelligence (Cable Censorship) at 20 Broad St., New York City, during the first World War.—G. M. Patison, P. O. Box 128, Hollywood, Cal.

Have two brothers and two sisters, a mother past seventy-five, a dad of eighty-two. All interested in the attempt to contact a missing brother. Information wanted of George Verner Richards, born on farm in Monroe Co., Carleton, Mich., age 54, missing from Ann Arbor, Mich., since 1923. Was successful garage operator. May be in Canada, most likely in garage, or gas and oil business at this time. Was a reader of *Adventure* and may see this. Anyone knowing will please advise Vern's brother. Address Winn V. Richards, Old Moscow Tavern Antique Shop, Moscow, Mich.

In 1914, I located a long lost brother through "Lost Trails." Will you run the following for me?—Roscoe I. Smith born in Nickerson, Kansas, March 12, 1889. Sometimes known as Art Smith or Frank Smith. Please write your brother Harry C. Smith, 3820 Flower St., Bell, Calif. My father is very old now and while we did find one brother through your magazine in 1914 and have stayed in touch ever since, the one lost sheep means more to my father than the others.

John Beardsley and Marion French, if alive, please communicate with 66 Wall St., Pontiac, Mich.; an old friend from Camp Columbia, Cuba, would like to hear from you. L. H. Harvey.

Louis Sequer, last heard from in Hericourt Hte, Saone, France. If any word notify Private Robert Owen, Company L—5th Infantry, Canal Zone.

Guy C. Pinney, Conneautville, Pa., R.D. 4, wants word of his son Roscoe Clarance Pinney, who left Sheridan, Wyo., in 1919 or 1920. He enlisted in the 81st Battalion Canadian Expeditionary Force, Sept. 1915, served in the First Brigade Co. F.A., France, discharged July 12, 1919. Five ft. 11 in. tall, fair, blue eyes, now 43 years old, left-handed. Last heard from in Santa Barbara, Calif.

George Richardson, woolsorter—served apprenticeship at "Willey's" in England. Came to So. Barre, Mass., in 1924, returned to England, went to New Zealand, Tasmania and Australia. Last heard from him at South Melbourne, Victoria, March 2, 1931, was leaving within a week for Broken Hill, New South Wales. Word appreciated by Carle Fossett, P.O. Box 264, Barre, Mass.

Joseph William Baldwin, last heard of in Detroit, Dec., 1920, reared in Rochester, N. Y.; age, 42. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Clyde W. Cook, 54 Davis St., Bradford, McKean Co., Penna.

Jack Bailey, erstwhile adventurer and soldier of fortune, please communicate with your old partner from San Jose, Calif., Chet (Piute Kid) Moore, c/o Adventure Magazine.

I would like to contact any members of C.C.C. Co. 885, stationed at Chandler, Okla., and Gillette, Wyo. Leon Rainwater, 818-17 Street, N.W., Washington, D. C.

Would like to get in touch with Albert McAuley who left Port Glasgow, Scotland, about 1923 for Canada. Bert Copley, 11741 Steel Ave., Detroit, Mich.

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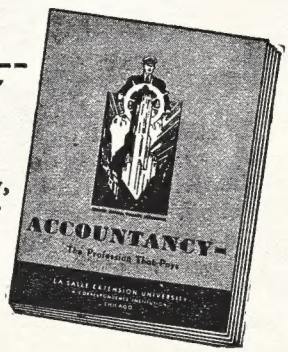

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He stopped, sliding on his heels—the growl sharpened to a snarl. . . .

THE BRAVE MAN OF KIGOMA

A novelette

by

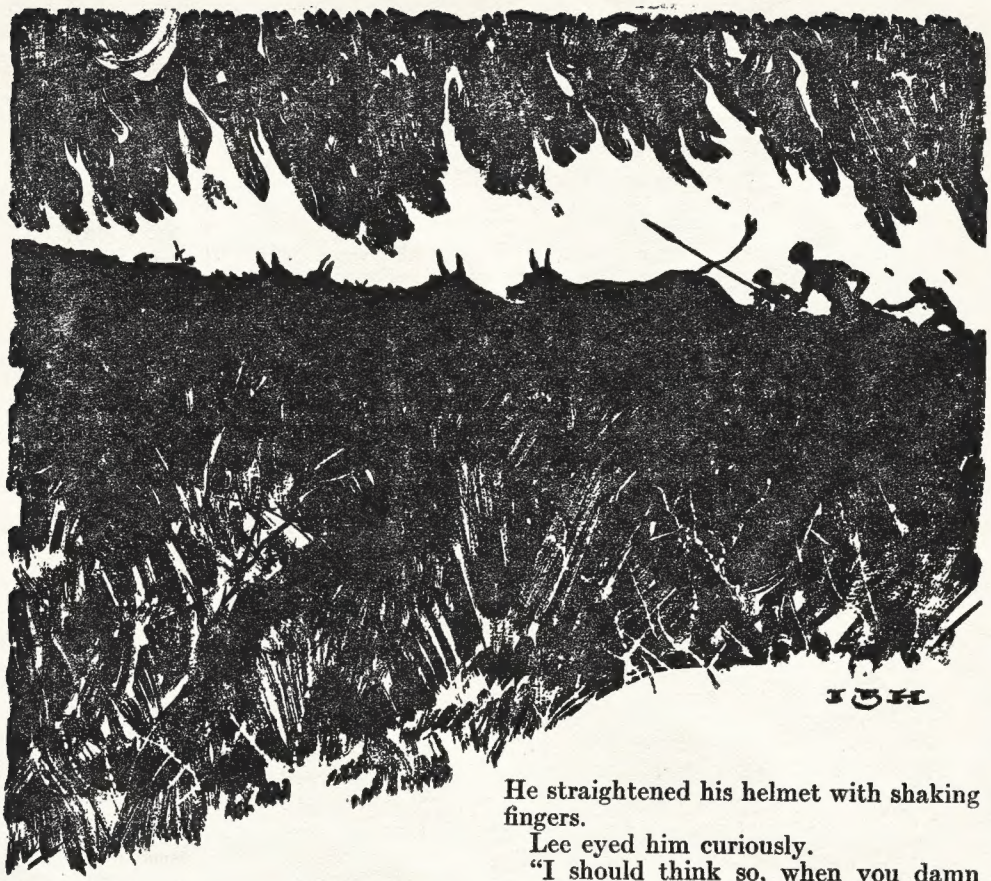
BRIAN O'BRIEN

A DUGOUT paddled by Zanzibaries crept slowly down a creek towards Kilindini Harbor, Mombasa. Two naval officers lounged amidships, helmets tilted over their sun-blistered foreheads.

"Keep in the shade, Hassan," growled one, mopping his neck.

They slid into green twilight under dripping greenery through water that was still and warm as blood. Heat filled the creek with steamy, breathless pressure and whisps of vapor arose from the quaking swamp on either side.

"Look out!" yelled John Coward, sub



lieutenant, scrambling madly to the stern.

He tugged at his revolver and fired shot after shot at a heavy, green snake that had plopped into the canoe from a low hanging branch.

The paddlers screeched frantically, scrambling away from the thrashing, hissing reptile.

"Sit down, damn it!" roared Lee, senior lieutenant, hanging on grimly.

The dugout rocked madly for a few minutes, then floated quietly, the Zanzibaris crouching fearfully in the bows; the mangled snake twitching amidships, where five holes in the bottom spouted muddy water.

"Fine bloody exhibition, I must say," snapped Lee.

Coward crouched, rigid as a statue, in the extreme stern, watching the squirming reptile with fascinated horror. Suddenly he flushed deeply and jammed his revolver into its holster.

"Er—sorry. Hate those filthy brutes." He straightened his helmet with shaking fingers.

Lee eyed him curiously.

"I should think so, when you damn nearly kill two paddlers, besides punching half a dozen holes in this leaky tub." He lifted his feet to avoid the water. "Hi, Ali! Heave that overboard and plug those holes. Igiri!"

"*Ya, Sidi.*" Gingerly the natives shoved the snake overside and bailed the canoe.

They were crossing the open harbor towards Mombasa.

"How long have you been out here, Coward?"

The sub-lieutenant winced at the inflection.

"Ten months. And ten months too long."

"So it would seem."

"I wish to God I could get where there's real action, instead of creeping about these filthy swamps like a sewerman."

"Why don't you transfer to the battle fleet?" drawled Lee.

"I might, at that," snapped the younger man.

The canoe bumped a wharf and the

two climbed to the road. Coward marched stiffly to his bungalow, a screened frame hut near the coaling wharf.

"Whiskey-soda," he ordered and went to bathe.

He stripped his sweat soaked shirt and shorts, scanning the floor before he removed his shoes; he remembered his horror one morning when a pallid scorpion had crawled out of his slipper. His brother officers had been awfully amused at his shocked gasp and for hours he had trembled like a leaf. Then there was the time when a little blue snake had fallen, hissing, on his helmet; he could still feel its cold writhing body on his neck. He noticed a difference in his messmates after that; they seemed to grin ironically when they mentioned his name.

"I'll apply for a transfer," he told himself, towelling briskly.

He stood before a small mirror, shaving. A tall, brown faced reflection stared back at him. There was no fear in the gray eyes that scowled from below level brows. His mouth was firm, though tense and bitten. But over all his thin, burned face was a nervous tautness. He was dressing when a boy appeared with a chit asking him to report to the commanding officer.

Buttoning his tunic, he walked across the sun scorched compound to the screened-off bungalow of Commander Bigby R.N.

"Ah! Come in, Coward," called Bigby from a darkened room. "Have a seat. Be with you in a sec."

"Thank you, sir."

Bigby bustled out. He was short, broad shouldered and firmly buttoning his third chin inside his tunic. Coward knew him for a good sailor and a keen opportunist.

"Ah! Glad to see you, Coward. Er—have a drink?"

They nodded and drank.

"Er—" Bigby mopped his sweating, brick-red features, "how d'you like Mombasa?"

The young man glanced at him. He looked uncomfortable and his small, blue eyes were irritable.

"What d'you mean, sir?"

"Oh, nothing. Nothing. By the way, you've had plenty of experience with small craft, haven't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"H-m—er— How'd you like a transfer—I don't mean— Oh, hell; Look here—beastly position for a man to be in." He rubbed his head violently. "Look here—er—Coward, I understand you don't like this place much—people noticin'—and so on. I mean. Well, I've just heard of a marv'lous opportunity for you. Naval Dockyard, Simonstown, wants an officer with your qualifications; crash boats, torpedo chasers and so forth."

So old Bigby knew all about it and wanted to be rid of him.

"Wonderful opportunity," he went on hurriedly. "Don't know what the job is, but it's a great chance for promotion. Near Capetown and all the fun, don't you know. Damme! I'd like the job meself. What d'you say?"

Coward felt his face redden.

"I'll be glad to go, sir."

"Good!" Bigby brightened up considerably. "Righto! Righto! I'll arrange it. Sorry to see you go, y'know. One o' my best officers."

"When do you want me to start, sir?"

"H-m. Destroyer *Cynthia* leaves day after tomorrow to convoy the Appam down coast; you can go in her. Cape patrol takes over at Durban; you disembark there and go overland to Capetown."

ABOARD *Cynthia* Coward felt happier. She was hot as an oven and rolled like a pig in the Indian Ocean swell. They had an anxious moment off Zanzibar with a submarine alarm. *Cynthia* quartered like a bird dog for three hours but found nothing.

"Damned nuisance," snapped her youthful commander. "I wanted to try out my new four-inchers."

The rest of the voyage was uneventful and Coward went ashore at Durban. Two days later he arrived in Capetown and rode out to Simonstown in a dockyard truck. He looked over False Bay, where several destroyers and a couple of light cruisers lay at anchor. An orderly ushered him to a white painted building

from the roof of which fluttered the Union flag and the white ensign. He entered a wide, airy room with long, open windows giving on to the bay. An aide motioned him to wait. He sat down eyeing two other people, one a lieutenant commander, the other a civilian.

"Oh," the aide came over. "Better introduce you people. Lt.-Commander Stacey, this is sub-lieutenant Coward. Major Derby—Sub-lieutenant Coward."

Coward shook hands and waited.

"What's it all about, d'you suppose?" asked Derby, a tall, massive-shouldered man in well worn tweeds. He was bronzed an even gold color and his hair, also gold and a mighty golden mustache gave him, with his brilliant blue eyes, the appearance of an ancient viking.

"Don't know; some special duty, I suppose," said Stacey. He stood up and moved towards the window. He was well over six feet and his shoulders seemed about to burst his tight tunic. Thin black hair covered a bullet head and his dimpled cheeks, wide jaws and pointed chin went oddly with cold, gray eyes and a long, knife-thin mouth.

The aide disappeared, then returned, holding a door open.

"The admiral will see you, gentlemen," he announced.

Coward followed the others into a large room decorated with maps and charts. Before the windows, at a broad, immaculate desk, sat the admiral, a tall, thin faced man with sparse white hair and a long humorous mouth. A double row of medal ribbons decorated his tunic.

"Morning, gentlemen." He extended a thin, brown hand to each in turn. You've been chosen for a very important mission. A mission of the utmost importance to our cause in Africa."

In Africa! Coward tried to smother a feeling of dismay.

"A mission for which your separate qualifications are peculiarly fitted," went on the precise voice. "Stacey, you have commanded M. L. flotillas. Coward, you have handled all types of small craft. Major Derby, your distinguished service in the hinterland will be of priceless service."

Major Derby! Coward eyed the tall, blond man. He was the boundary commissioner! A man whose name was a legend among the tribes over the whole of central and east Africa. Why, he had put down the Ruwendi rebellion alone. Phew! He looked at the admiral. What on earth was up?

"Do either of you, besides Derby, of course, know Tanganyika?"

They shook their heads.

"Well, here is the story. Tanganyika was the most important of the German African territories before the last war. Since then the natives have been quite satisfied, even happy, under our administration. But, thanks to a law passed in 1925 permitting free entry to ex-enemy nationals, there were nearly four thousand Germans in Tanganyika at the outbreak of war. Actually there were more German landowners than British, and every one of those Germans has been working to get the country back to his government. And not only Tanganyika; the enemy plan is to create a Mittel Afrika belt, that will absorb to German control everything between the Union of South Africa and the Sahara. The action will begin in Tanganyika, which is already flooded with subversive propaganda. Many of the hinterland tribes are affected already."

The admiral pounded softly on his desk.

"There is one thing that enables the white race to successfully administer native states, and that is that the natives have grown to regard whites as superior beings. I mean superior to the ordinary passions of greed, lust, hate and so on. During war that god-like prestige is badly shaken. Natives see whites kill each other for no reason that the blacks can understand. They themselves are encouraged to kill whites."

The admiral swept burning eyes over them.

"D'you begin to see what I'm driving at? Once they thought the white man was a god. Now they're not so sure."

HE swung about and stabbed a long forefinger at a map on the wall.

"Here's Lake Tanganyika. This long, crescent shaped body of water

forms nearly five hundred miles of the border between Tanganyika and the Belgian Congo. Here at Kigoma on the Tanganyika side, at the head of the railroad connecting the lake and the Indian Ocean, is a mission, supposedly Swiss, but really German. That mission has requested permission to build a steamer for use on the lake. Some damned fool gave it to them. We have reason to believe that steamer will be used to convert the heathen to something mighty different from Christianity."

"Good Lord!"

"Their specifications call for an eight hundred ton vessel capable of twelve knots. Such a craft, convertible into an armed cruiser, could dominate five hundred miles of the Tanganyika border, the same length of Belgian Congo territory. The lake enters Nyassaland and Rhodesia; they can land troops and arouse blacks and stir up such a mess as we never could clear up. That, gentlemen, is what you have to stop."

"How?" Coward blurted.

"It has been decided to put two armed motor launches in the lake."

"Fine!"

"There are two on their way here now; should arrive in the *Inverurie Castle* in two days. They are forty feet long, seven feet beam; draught about four feet, loaded. They are powered with 100 H.P. twin screw gasoline engines."

"Sound like crash boats; M. L. X. type. Fifteen knots, aren't they?"

"That's the type, except that they'll be armed; machine-guns aft and three pounder Hotchkiss quick firers for'ard."

"When do we start, sir?" Stacey asked.

"Wait a minute," the admiral smiled. "It's not so easy as that, you know. We can't ship them over the Tanganyika railroad to the lake."

"Why not, sir?"

"Because every enemy agent in the country—and there are many, both white and native—would know our plan. That would precipitate the very thing we want to avoid; they'd accelerate building their ship, arm her and smash our craft before we could get 'em launched. We've got to get in the lake before they know anything about it. Whoever gets there first has control. We could shell their ship to bits before she is clear of the ways. The trouble is to get our launches there first."

Derby was scrutinizing the map.

"There's only a small bit at the south end of the lake that extends into British territory, in Rhodesia here. But we'd have to manhandle those launches over six hundred miles of mountains."

"Out of the question," said the admiral. "It would take too long. Our craft have to be in commission before the wet season commences, that's in four months. If they are not there by then the enemy will have five extra months to complete their plans."

"H-m," mumbled Derby. "Can't get through Kenya; that'd mean crossing into Belgian territory."

The admiral stood up. "Gentlemen, I leave it to you to choose your own route to the lake; Major Derby knows all the trails in that section. Go any way you like, under any circumstances you deem fit. You had better purchase the necessary supplies in Capetown; if they are Navy issue they may attract too much attention."

The admiral came from behind the desk.

"Good luck, gentlemen." He shook hands. "I don't want to hear from you until those launches are patrolling Lake Tanganyika. I don't want to know anything of your route or your methods of getting there. Is that clear?"

They saluted and filed out.

"I say," muttered Stacey when they reached the yard. "That's damned funny; no instructions, free hand, wants to know nothing until it's all over. What the hell's it all about?"

Derby was grinning.

"I think I know," he said softly. "*What* a picnic!"

CHAPTER II

SAFARI

THEY followed Derby into the empty mess and he spread on a table a large scale map of South and Central Africa.

"I imagine I was seconded to this saf-

ari because I know the country pretty well," he said. "The Congo is practically void of roads, so we can get through without being suspected. Here's the route." His finger moved slowly. "We go by train from Capetown to Fungurume, that's just above Elizabethville, Belgian Congo, and railhead; about 2,300 miles from here. Then we'll have to trek to Sankisia, about 180 miles; there's eight miles of narrow gauge there to Bukama; that's on the Lualaba, or upper Congo. We go down river for 200 miles to Kabolo. Then all we have to do is go by a railway following the Lukuga river to the Lake. It's about 150 miles. They were working on it when I was there last, about two months ago. They had thirteen miles to go; they should be through by now.

See: The enemy would never think of our coming through the Congo. We'd be in the lake and patrolling it before he knew where he was."

"How long will it take to get there, would you say?"

"Let me see. Six days to Fungurume. The trip to Sankisia is tough; we'll have to use tractors and oxen, say six weeks. Then perhaps a month to get down river; it'll be pretty low. And a day to the lake. We can manage it by November at the latest.

Stacey bent over the map, scratching his head.

"Yes, that's the best route," he said. "We'll take it. But how will we account for those launches. Can't very well disguise them, you know."

"Why not pretend to be a transportation company," said Coward, who felt he had listened long enough. "We could call ourselves the—the Congo Navigation Company."

Stacey glared.

"Good idea," applauded Derby. "That'll explain our route down the Lualaba. We can change plans at Kabolo and dash for the lake. It'll take only a day to get there and we'll have the lake under control before anyone can warn the enemy."

"You people seem to be doing what you like with this expedition," said Stacey acidly. "Did it ever strike you that I'm in command of it?"

"Sorry," said Derby calmly. "But it seems to me that we'll do better to work together rather than think of superiority. Especially," he added pointedly, "since we'll go as civilians."

"Nevertheless, you're under my orders. Is that understood?"

"Of course."

"Very well, since you know all the route, you'd better go ahead and see that everything is ready for us to go through. There will be native carriers to arrange, I presume, and traction for the launches. If we have to drag them over roads, I'll have to get some kind of wheeled cradles for them."

"Get wide tread wheels," suggested Derby. "The going will be soft in spots. I'll go ahead and start things. Wire me at Fungurume when you're ready to start and I'll meet you there."

"Very well."

They watched Derby go out. Coward was holding his temper with difficulty.

"You had better get down to Capetown," said Stacey. "Meet the *Inverurie Castle* day after tomorrow and get the launches under cover. I'll work out a supply list."

"Very well."

"Sir," said Stacey pointedly.

"I beg your pardon." Coward, furious, swung out of the mess room.

Derby was walking across the yard. Coward ran after him.

"I say, Major Derby," he began. "I—"

"Oh, what ho!" smiled Derby. "Fine job, isn't it? I say, what d'you think of our superior officer?"

"Oh," Coward felt uncomfortable. "All right, I think."

"He'll be splendid when we get settled down," said the older man. "When you start collecting supplies, see that there is plenty of tow rope. That run from Fungurume to Sankisia is a bad one. Swamps, a mountain to overcome, sandy tracks. I'm going to arrange for some oxen and a couple of steam tractors. It'll be a tough business, but what a picnic!"

TWO days later Coward was at South Basin watching the trim gray hull of the Union Castle steamer. A gray tweed suit fitted him fairly well and a wide felt

hat shaded his face. When the ship docked he went aboard to watch the unloading. There were several cases marked 'machinery' and a number of twenty gallon gasoline drums. Some smaller boxes would be ammunition for the Hotchkiss and machine-guns, he decided. Then he stiffened with interest when the launches, shrouded in canvas were slung out of the after well deck. Carefully they swung overside and were lowered on to flat cars. Coward had time to see their trim hulls with step keels and outside propeller shafts. As he watched a broad shouldered individual in a blue suit and soft hat strode along the quay.

It was Stacey, and Coward hurried down to him.

"Get those hulls measured," he was told, "and bring the figures to me; I'm at the Mount Nelson. I've got to have cradles made. You'd better have Congo Navigation Company stencilled on the canvas and all over those cases. You'd better not come to see me unless I send for you; less we're noticed together the better."

For the next three weeks Coward was busily engaged in superintending the painting of cases and the collection of supplies. Great coils of rope came in, tow chains, water carriers, food, until he realized with some misgiving that one hundred and eight tons of supplies were stacked in the great warehouse.

Stacey came down to watch the housing of the hulls in massive wooden cradles which were axled and fitted with broad treaded steel wheels. His last purchase was a three and one-half ton covered motor truck.

"We'll have to keep the ammunition in that," he decided. "I'm flying to Fungurume. You come on by train with the launches."

"Yes, sir." Coward wouldn't be caught again.

"I hope you've managed to keep your mouth shut about this business."

"Of course," Coward snapped furiously.

"By the way," Stacey's cold eyes measured him. "I received a letter from my friend Bigby. He mentioned you."

Coward felt suddenly cold.

"And I'm not going to stand any bloody nonsense, understand? These launches are going through; I'm responsible for that, and if you let me down, God help you."

"Don't worry." Coward managed to say. "Sir."

Coward went out. He felt suffocated. What had Bigby told Stacey? He knew that if he showed the slightest fear the bull-necked commander would not hesitate to report him to the admiral, and that would mean everlasting disgrace and the end of his career.

Next morning he moved from his hotel, bought tickets, went to the terminus and collected waybills, and watched five cars coupled on to the Elizabethville train, and climbed aboard.

On the evening of the sixth day the train puffed into Elizabethville. Coward stepped out on a wide platform to stretch his legs. A mighty, smiling native with blue-black, tattooed face, a battered felt hat on one side of his shaven skull and little red beads in one ear, stood before him.

"Me, I Kaliki," he saluted. "Ba'as say, give you this book."

Coward opened an envelope.

"Bearer Kaliki, a Basuto and his three pals, whom I've christened Winken, Blinken and Nod, are crew for steam tractors. Bring 'em along. . . . . Cheerio, Derby."

Two machines, tall-funnelled with high, wide treaded wheels, stood on flat cars in a siding. Three cheerful looking blacks sat in their cabs.

Coward arranged for the flat cars to be coupled on to the train and bought tickets for the four Basutos. Then he returned to his compartment for dinner, reflecting that it would probably be the last decent meal he would get for some time.

That night, sweltering beneath a mosquito net, he listened to the whirr of insects outside the stationary coach, twitching unhappily as sweat trickled down his tense limbs. He had not noticed the beastly things while the train was moving, but here, in the heart of Africa, with illimitable forest only a few hundred yards away, it seemed difficult to breathe. From time to time he dozed, once to awake, gasping, at the sound of a

soft body moving outside. It took minutes to persuade himself that it could be nothing but a roaming dog.

Sometime before dawn the train pulled out, arriving at Fungurume about noon.

RAILHEAD was a splintered wound in the forest where the red earthworks of the railway extended between ravaged trees to the north. Stocky Belgians with pallid, bearded faces beneath soiled, conical helmets strolled languidly about, flicking at cringing natives with vicious, twisted strips of elephant hide. Beside the track were rails, steel ties, and material for construction. To the east a narrow trail disappeared into the forest.

Derby, in khaki shirt and shorts, a cork helmet tilted over one ear, looked out of a tent, waved and hurried over.

"What ho!" he called. "Well, here you are; I see you brought Kaliki and his merry lads. Hallo Kaliki, you old scoundrel." Kaliki beamed as Derby banged him on the back and ran down the train to roar at his three assistants.

"Road's pretty good ahead," he continued. "I've got millions of natives working on it, building bridges and so on. We'll get this stuff off loaded today and start tomorrow. What d'you say?"

"Fine."

They walked together down the train and looked up at the two hulls securely bolted in their cradles and covered with canvas.

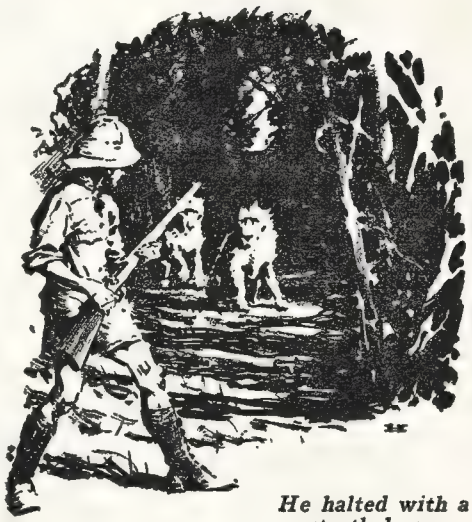
"Look pretty nice, don't they." Derby eyed them carefully. "Have a bit of a job with 'em in spots, though. Oh, you'd better report to our commanding officer. He's in that tent, and in a very bad temper."

Coward walked to the tent and looked inside. Stacey was lolling on a camp bed, a bottle and glass close beside him. He looked up, wiping his sweating face.

"So you got here," was his pleasant greeting. "Everything all right?"

"Yes, sir."

"These Belgians are damned inquisitive," he complained. "It seems that the river is under control of a concession, trade concession, and they don't like our coming through. Pity you couldn't have



He halted with a startled cry.

thought of a better name for this blasted safari."

"Sorry," was all Coward could say.

"Well, don't stand there soldiering," snapped the older man. "Get the damned supplies unloaded and we'll start."

Seething, Coward walked back to the train. The Basutos under Kaliki were edging the tractors down a ramp.

"Better manhandle those cruisers," Derby suggested. "My word! Lofty beasts, aren't they?"

He shouted orders and some two hundred natives trooped to the flat cars screaming, heaving and tugging until the cruisers rested safely on their wheeled cradles behind the tractors.

"All the ammunition's in the truck, isn't it?" Derby whispered.

"Yes, about six tons of it, and the truck is only built for three and a half, so you'd better go easy."

"Rather! I'll drive it myself and park it near the tents so these gentry won't be too inquisitive about it."

BY nightfall the supplies were unloaded and covered with a grass shelter. Over four hundred carriers squatted nearby, waiting to start in the morning. Kaliki shackled the cradles to the tractors and the motor truck, fuelled, was parked outside Derby's tent.

"Well, that's that," said the major. "All ready to begin. We ought to make fair time; the road's not bad ahead. How d'you feel?"

"Fine," said Coward, startled. "Why?"

"Ever been in the bush before?"

"Only about Mombasa."

"H-m. Well, it's a bit different here. Sometimes it gets you with its closed in feeling. You know—sort of spooky, even in the day time. Don't let it worry you; just keep calm, that's all."

Coward stole a glance at him. Derby's face was hidden as he lit his pipe. Did he know anything? Had Stacey talked to him?

"Used to scare the daylights out of me," said Derby smiling. "Still does, sometimes, and I've been out here twenty-five years."

"Thanks," said Coward warmly.

He wanted to say more to the kindly faced man, but he couldn't. He felt a tremendous urge to tell him all of his fears.

He felt that here was one man who would understand.

"It's like a great immutable, invisible enemy," went on Derby. "You've got to lick it yourself. But you never know whether you have or not."

"Bon soir, messieurs."

A fat, pale face poked itself through the tent entrance.

"*Bon soir*—er—old lad," returned Derby. "Come on in."

"*Merci.* T'ank you."

A round-shouldered individual squeezed in and sat, beaming on a bed. He accepted a drink and swallowed it appreciatively.

"Ah! *Merci!* You come for le sport? *Non?*" His little dark eyes flitted quickly about the tent.

"No," Derby smiled. "We go to the Congo—savvy? Congo, to make na-viga-tion. You know, put-aput-aput."

"So?" *Mais,* already is campagnie de navigation in Congo."

"Yes," smiled Derby. "But Congo is big enough for two, non?"

"Ah *oui.*" The fat features creased in uncertain laughter. "*Monsieur* make joke."

"*Oui,*" smiled Derby. "Ha-ha-ha! What a wag!" he mumbled.

"Other *monsieur.* He too is navigation?"

"*Oui.*"

The Belgian switched suddenly.

"You bring plenty goods," he suggested. "W'at ees in the camion?" he winked. "You keep him closed, *sous garde.*"

"Ah, the truck." Derby looked mysterious. "You understand, *monsieur,* we keep our special things there; brandy, whiskey—would you like a bottle—a little present?"

"*Monsieur's* too kind."

Derby handed over a bottle of brandy and the visitor clasped it to his sweating bosom with cries of delight. After expressions of great admiration he went out.

"Phew," sighed the blonde man. "That inquisitive monkey might have caused trouble. We'll have to be careful. This country is full of small officials who pry into everything. Watch out for them, and remember a bottle of brandy is a jolly good passport."

"I will." Coward was amused.

"I say, what d'you think of our O.C.?"

"I don't know him very well," admitted Coward. "I suppose he's all right."

"I think he's a bit of a swine," declared Derby flatly. "He's got the reputation of being a medal hunter. Watch out for him."

"Yes, I'll do that."

"Well, better turn in; we've got an early start in the morning."

Coward went to his tent and crawled under his mosquito net. For a long time he lay listening to the dew dripping on his tent from overhanging trees and from somewhere in the bush a tom-tom throbbed in uneasy rhythm. The night was filled with the whirr of insects like the roar of traffic in a big city. A watchman began tinkling on a gourd harp and the liquid notes soothed him to sleep.

Yells outside warned him that the Belgians were rousing their laborers. Kaliki stood at his tent entrance. The ground was wet and a chill mist filled the clearing. His servant brought fruit and tea. Stacey strode to him, wrapped in a raincoat.

"I'm going ahead to Mohia with Derby," he announced. "It's fifty miles north

west. You follow as soon as you're ready. I'll send him back later."

"Cheerio," called Derby from the truck controls. "Take it easy; plenty of time."

Coward watched the truck disappear into the forest. His tent was already dismantled and Kaliki despatched the carriers under headmen. The Basutos fired their tractors and in an hour were ready to start.

With a blast of its whistle the first tractor jerked into motion.

"Look out!" called Coward. "The cradle wheels have sunk in the clay."

But it was too late. With an earsplitting crack an axle broke and the cruiser sagged by the head in its collapsed cradle.

The Belgians howled with laughter.

CHAPTER III

CLAWS OF THE JUNGLE

COWARD examined the damage in complete dismay. The Belgians crowded around, yelling with mirth and nudging each other. Natives, seeing the white men so amused, also laughed until the whole clearing echoed with their shouts. Even the Basutos grinned uncertainly. Coward seethed with anger. For a moment he considered removing a few grins from those dirty faces. Then he pulled himself together.

"Come, Kaliki!" he called. "Shore this up."

The Basutos levered with branches while Coward coaxed and eventually bribed the Belgians to lend him jacks and the two cradles were raised until their wheels left the ground.

"We'll have to strengthen all four axles," he decided. "Dammit! That means at least two days."

The white men, warmed with brandy, consented to lend labor, and within four hours Coward was fitting great baulks of mahogany to the axle frames. By night they were bolted into place and he felt they might hold. He rested in Fungurume that night and by dawn was on his way. The cradles rode slowly but safely behind the tractors.

Coward walked ahead into the green depths of the forest, a rifle in the crook of his arm. As soon as he left railhead the forest closed in on him; he could not see more than twenty yards in any direction. There were tracks in the soft earth, some of which had been made since the truck had passed over the road. There were the dainty cuts of antelope hooves, larger pugs he could not identify, and once the rosettes that told of a leopard's passing. He forced himself to round every bend in the trail without hesitation. Several times he halted at rustlings in the bush and the crash of some retreating beast. The tracks of Derby's truck, promising companionship ahead, gave him some comfort and he walked quickly, hoping the great wood-burning tractors with their ungainly loads would make better time. But they had to halt frequently to cut away low hanging branches. Each time he waited, unwilling to be far from them.

All about him smooth, gray trunks diminished in endless perspective until they dissolved in blue-green mist in the liana-choked depths of the forest. He felt hemmed in; he could not see the sky for a canopy of restless leaves far above his head. Once he halted with a startled cry. Two baboons squatted in the path, baring long eye teeth as they watched him.

He hitched forward his rifle, but they loped away and he sighed with relief.

At noon they caught up with the rearmost carriers who had started the day before. Unwatched by whites, they had taken their time and were lying comfortably over a mile of trail. Coward hounded them on again while the tractors took on more wood from a stack. They were resting when he heard a bleat of the truck and his heart sank as he saw the ill-tempered features of Stacey beside Derby's impassive head.

"What the hell have you been up to?" roared Stacey." Good God! You haven't made fifteen miles."

Coward tried to explain the broken axle.

"Rot! I designed those cradles myself. They wouldn't break if you handled the things properly."

"Nevertheless they broke," snapped

Coward, "and I couldn't start until this morning."

"What! Spent a whole day hanging around that damned camp?"

"Look here." said Derby pacifically. "No use in wrangling. We've got a job to do."

"Mind your own damned business, and get back to Mohia and guard that ammunition. I'll stay here and see if I can't get a little speed. Here, you, Coward. Get ahead and hurry up those carriers. I'll ride with the cruisers. We've got to get to Mohia tonight."

The truck turned with difficulty and started up the trail. Coward followed, listening to Stacey bellowing orders at the Basutos. In half an hour he caught up with the carriers.

"Now, keep up with me," he ordered the foremost headman.

He walked briskly ahead, glad for once to be alone. Anything was better than Stacey. Singing and tapping with safari sticks on the loads ahead of them, the carriers made fair time and Coward, sweating, forgot the forest in his anger. Suddenly he was aware of fading light.

There were shouts from the carriers and he stopped to watch Stacey pedalling a bicycle up the trail.

"What the devil are you dawdling for?" he shouted, dismounting. "Those tractors are up to you already."

"The men are loaded; they can't make better time."

"Well, I'm not going to sleep in this blasted bush. I'm going on to Mohia." He remounted and pedalled furiously away.

Coward marched ahead, eyes open for wood stacks and water bases. A tractor whistled as signal that it was stopping for water, and darkness closed in like a curtain.

"We camp here?" enquired Kaliki, running up.

"All right."

WATCH fires were lit and the carriers hunched around them, cooking their rations. Coward walked back to the tractors, looming oddly against the dim, green tracery of foliage. He watched his tent pitched and sat down to eat his dinner of a freshly killed chicken, potatoes he had brought from Capetown, and a green mess his servant insisted was 'spinneg'. All about him tiny points of light swung, flickered and disappeared. With the roar of the machines stilled, bush noises whirred and clacked. There were frogs, crickets, great buzzing flies and tiny whining sounds he could not recognize. He lit a cigarette and dragged gratefully at the tobacco.

The tractor men cooked at their fires. They seemed happy enough with the ruddy glare playing over their muscular limbs. One of the carriers sang a minor chant in which others joined at intervals. Wearily he started to undress, then stopped and stretched himself fully clothed on his camp bed. As an afterthought he took off his boots and hung them on the ridge pole.

He awakened at dawn haggard and unrefreshed. A cup of tea helped a little and he hurried the carriers until they, followed by the tractors and their cradles, moved up the mist filled trail.

When the sun came up mosquitos whined like tuneless violins about his ears and he beat at them desperately, smoking to keep them off. He searched the tangle ahead for signs of the forest edge. The carriers dawdled behind and frequently he halted, fidgeting until the roar of the tractors told him they were close behind.

Once, busy with his thoughts, he wandered far ahead. Suddenly he realized that the familiar clatter had stopped, that the jungle was silent as a tomb. The carriers were not behind him; it was as though they had been spirited away. All about him the trees crowded a barrier to prevent his escape. There was no wind and nothing moved in the heat. He moved on, but something seemed to keep pace with him, moving with padded feet close behind. He stopped; the thing stopped. He listened, straining his ears above the sick thumping of his heart, for sounds of the carriers. Nothing. He moved again and there was consciousness of a mighty creature looming close to him. He stared around. His eyes fastened on the thick, buttressed trunk of a cottonwood tree. Surely something had slipped silently behind it. Fearfully he

backed away until his shoulders struck a smooth trunk. There was no sound; he was in a silence that oppressed him like a pitiless grip. The outlines of a great trunk fogged as his eyes strained until they lost focus. His breath whistled in his throat. Suddenly, yelling, he threw himself at the cottonwood, scrambling, stumbling until he got around it. There was nothing. He leaned against the tree, weakness flooding him. Then he stood up, composure gradually returning. Then he heard the soft voices of his carriers and, staggering a little, he walked towards them. Somewhere beneath the shame of his fear was a queer comfort.

Later the trail descended a gentle slope, at the bottom of which was a dried watercourse. Logs had been stacked to form a causeway across it. The surface was decked with brushwood and stamped earth.

The first tractor jerked slowly down the incline like a doubtful elephant until its small front wheels crunched on the causeway. The carriers piled their loads and perched like crows to watch. The logs shifted and groaned as they took the full weight and Coward, tense as a steel spring, watched the timbers split as the machine inched to the opposite side. Then wheels bit into soft earth and the tractor could not move. The cruiser sagged in the swaying logs.

"Hey. Bring plank!" yelled Kaliki.

Natives thrust brushwood under the wheels and the tractor, groaning and clanking, toiled up the slope. Several logs slipped out of place as the cradle waddled across, but after mending the deck and piling small branches on the deeply rutted surface the other cruiser got over without mishap.

Before dark they passed over four more causeways.

Coward was sitting outside his tent when he heard the beat of a motor and Derby's headlights shone through the trees.

"What ho!" he hailed. "How are my bridges?"

"Pretty good."

"Glad you like 'em. There are a hundred and fifty between here and Sankisia."

"Good God!"

"Bloody, isn't it? Tractors holding up all right?" he looked over the cruisers, the firelight flickering on their canvas covers. "H-m Tweedledum and Tweedledee. Hey, Kaliki," he called. "You savvy name for these ships? This one Tweedledum, this one Tweedledee."

He left the Basutos trying to pronounce them.

"Better give 'em names," he said. "Natives already think of the damn things as spirits. I say, I'd like to camp with you tonight, then get back to Mohia tomorrow. You should arrive by night. Then I'll have everything ready for the next trek."

Coward's servant produced a fair dinner. The two finished it and sat in the murmurous darkness, smoking quietly. Coward glanced at the burly, fairhaired man lolling in a camp chair. He looked about forty-five; must have started early in Africa, he reflected. He felt a grateful comfort in Derby's presence. His clean-cut, high-nosed features were serene in the firelight. Occasionally he cocked his head to listen to bush sounds and his voice would hush a little. He chuckled suddenly.

"Stacey's spitting blood up at Mohia," he grinned. "He arrived there sometime during the night on a bike and in a towering rage; seemed he'd fallen off a few times. He's been fuming because you haven't flown these things; threatens to have you court-martialled. I told him not to be a silly ass, and he threatened to have *me* court-martialled. Pleasant little soul, ain't he? I told him Mohia's full of sleeping sickness and he's under a mosquito net now, sweating and getting tight."

"What's he think he's going to have me court-martialled for?" asked Coward carefully.

"He didn't say," replied Derby; but Coward caught a quick glance that made him uneasy.

"Look here, we'll just stop overnight at Mohia," went on the big man. "Can you be ready to start day after you arrive?"

"Of course."

"Fine. It's not because of Stacey. But this really is sleeping sickness country. I have sixty-four oxen coming up; should

arrive tomorrow. We'll have to force 'em through the uplands before they get bitten."

"Tse-tse flies?"

"Yes. Dirty little brutes. Look like house flies except that their wings are crossed and spotted." He knocked out his pipe. "Well, turn in, I think. 'Night, old man, sleep tight." He called good night to the natives and climbed into his empty truck to sleep.

WHEN Coward awakened Derby was standing beside his truck.

"What ho!" he smiled. "Bit coolish, what! I'm off. Cheerio. I say, don't bother about Stacey; we'll get through all right."

He put down his tea cup, climbed into the truck and with a wave of the hand disappeared into the forest.

"Go ahead." Coward signalled Kaliki, driving Tweedledum, and watched the tractors sway off. The engines were dim roars in the distance by the time his tent was packed and the four hundred carriers on the march. They passed a small, tumbledown village in a clearing, where a few natives crouched apathetically against the walls of their huts. Many of the grass roofs had fallen in and green stuff sprouted through the narrow doorways.

"Sick," muttered his servant, smothering himself in his cloth.

The natives trotted, eyes rolling fearfully as they passed the village. A fly settled on Coward's arm. With a shudder he brushed it off, but not before he noticed little black spots on its crossed wings. Hastily rolling down his sleeves, he thrust hands in his pockets and marched swiftly after the carriers. Several times that day he examined his arm for traces of a bite. The tractors halted to negotiate a causeway. Half an hour was spent in nursing the cruisers over it and another half hour in repairing the road against the arrival of the oxen. There were several villages, neglected and silent in the forest. In each a few thin ribbed blacks sprawled, covered with sores, their eyes half closed in coma.

The carriers ran past them, groaning at the delay in crossing innumerable causeways. Coward, nervous as a cat, watched the wabbling progress of cruisers over tottering rows of logs and yelled orders as the panicky natives shoved gingerly, ready to jump for safety at every lurch.

It was pitch dark when, stumbling with fatigue, he arrived at Mohia near the edge of the forest country. Fires showed three tents and a thatched hut sheltering the cased ammunition and guns. Derby waved to him as he watched the carriers pile their loads. He was walking over when a harsh voice bellowed his name. He stopped at Stacey's tent.

"Where the devil have you been?" barked the Lt.-Commander.

"I came as quickly as I could." Coward answered, taking stock of a half empty whisky bottle. "Had to cross several bridges, you know."

"Think I don't know the road?" yelled the other. "Dammit! I know what you had to cross. Damned insolent, insubordinate—" He stopped, breathing heavily. "I suppose you two think you can do as you like. That superior swine, Derby, thinks because he knows this country he can hoodwink me, and you follow him like a damned puppy."

"I'm afraid I don't understand." Coward held on to himself.

"You don't like plain talk, do you? Well, here it is. I know all about you. Scared of your own damned shadow, that's what. But if you think I'm going to be held back— Oh well, Dismiss. Start at dawn."

Coward went out.

He swallowed some food, conscious of Stacey's presence nearby. After dinner he listened, comforted, to Derby's calm voice yarning of his experiences in the back trails.

"Nice people, these savages," he said. "Perfect gents, and all that. Not so sure they're not cleverer than we, for all our so-called civilization; at least they're not tormented by ambition. They've had a pretty bad time one way and another, though. They've been taught to think that all white men are gods." His blue eyes moved towards Stacey's tent. "They've seen white men lie to each other, fight and kill each other, and

they're not quite so sure of them now. There's all sorts of mischief brewing about the lake, and if it's not stopped those simple savages are going to be let in for another siege of battle, murder and sudden death. It's hard on them. Bad enough for us when we *know* what we're fighting for. But they, poor devils, have to fight and die because some white man tells them—without telling them why." His eyes blazed and he tapped with his pipestem on Coward's knee. "We can stop that damned nonsense," he said quietly. "And we're going to do it. You and me, two ordinary dogs' bodies, are going to save several million natives from being sacrificed to a god that's more horrible than any their craziest witch doctors could ever invent." He leaned back, his teeth flashing. "*What* a picnic!"

COWARD felt something swell inside him. He wanted to say something dramatic, something grand.

"Yes, rather!" was all he could mumble, blushing.

"Haven't you forgotten something?" enquired a smooth voice behind them.

Stacey stepped into the firelight.

"I've been listening to your heroic little speech, Derby," he sneered, and Coward saw him sway. "You talk of the *two* of you. Dogs' bodies, I think you said. Two dogs' bodies is right," he blared. "There's only one man who is doing all the wonderful things you rave of, and that's me! I'm in charge, and that's all you need worry about."

"You're drunk!" snapped Derby. "The natives are noticing it, and that's enough to wreck the whole blasted business."

Stacey weaved a little and his teeth bared.

Coward went to his tent. He heard the two talking for a long time before he slept.

Just before dawn he was awakened by a tremendous hubbub. He got up, sluiced some water over his sticky body and went out. Oxen and dusty natives milled over the camp.

"What ho!" called Derby. "Here's the whole menagerie. Come and have some breakfast."

Coward ate while natives dismantled the tents and loaded the truck. Stacey looked at them, then turned away.

"How's he this morning?"

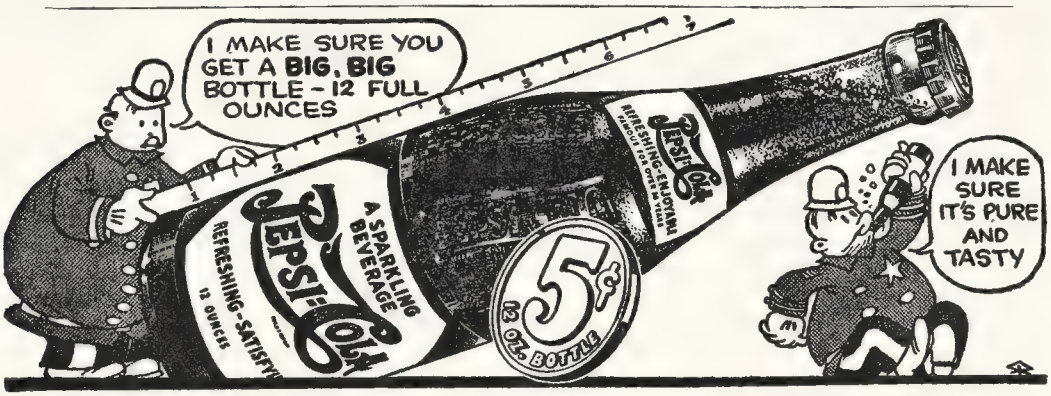
"All right," said Derby comfortably. "Bit feverish last night, y'know. He'll be all right, I think."

A native reported the truck loaded.

"I'm off to M'wendu Makou," said Derby. "Fifty miles on. You come on when you're ready. There will be natives at every causeway, left there to help with the crossings. Bring them along. There'll be extra loads, ox fodder, water and so on."

"Righto."

Coward watched the carriers step off, then the tractors started and he fell in behind them. The trees were fewer and he felt his spirits rising as he reached the edge of the forest. Ahead the country rolled under tall, yellow grass dotted with small, gnarled trees. The sun poured down and the sandy soil was hot through his boot soles. The cloudless sky was white with heat. The ground glittered relentlessly with mica, so that he seemed to be marching over a sea of fire.



By noon his eyes prickled and watered with the glare and his head ached abominably. From time to time he found gasoline drums filled with water and thatched against the heat. The trail consisted of hills and valleys at the bottom of which were the flimsy causeways that threatened to collapse every time they crossed. Several times the tractor fires had to be drawn while boiler tubes were cleaned of scummy deposits from the filthy water. At each causeway a growing gang of natives trooped after the machines, and Coward noticed uneasily their eagerness to reach the water caches.

"Softly," he warned. "Leave plenty for oxen."

They shuffled on in a fog of choking, yellow dust, the tractors puffing great clouds of smoke as they clanged and seethed ahead of him. At dusk he halted and went forward to a village and bargained with the headman for food and water, which he purchased with trade goods from cases slung on the cradles. It was dark before all were fed, and Coward sat outside his tent, waiting for the oxen and nursing his aching head. A heavy dose of quinine and aspirin helped a little. He tried to doze but was awakened near midnight by the lowing of the oxen and their drivers' cries. Wearily he saw them watered and fed, and dropped across his bed.

WHEN he awakened his ears rang with quinine, his eyes were gummy and stinging; he could scarcely open them. Bathing them, he swallowed more quinine with his tea and gave orders to start.

There was a rise in the trail and the tractors made slow progress in the dry sandy soil. He sent natives ahead to cut grass and brush to give the driving wheels purchase. When the sun rose his head began its raging throb, but he kept on, only conscious of the clatter of machinery behind him. He could but faintly see infrequent trees beside the crack and knew he was weaving, his feet scuffling through yellow, choking dust. Once he found himself on his hands and knees, staring stupidly at the ground. He reeled to his feet and shambled on. The seared grass was a shimmering sea that seemed ready to break over his head and drown him in glittering heat. There was a roaring in his ears. He tried to blink his granulated eyelids; something gripped his arms; he felt himself lifted, then a terrible jolting. He rode the rest of that day on a tractor, nauseated by the hot oil, every revolution of the wheels stabbing his brain. Gritting his teeth, he wondered if he had sunstroke. Perhaps, if he had, Stacey would send him back to Elizabethville. Perhaps he was going blind! Strange, that didn't seem to matter much. His eyes were stuck tight shut and a scarlet mist engulfed him. Then the engines stopped. He was lying on his back and something blessedly cool was over his face. He slept.

There were sounds, vague toneless voices that gradually became one voice.

"Ba'as! Ba'as. Me, Kaliki. Ba'as sick?"

"No. What time is it?"

"Mornin' time, Ba'as." The Basuto sounded frightened. "Ba'as, how we go do?"

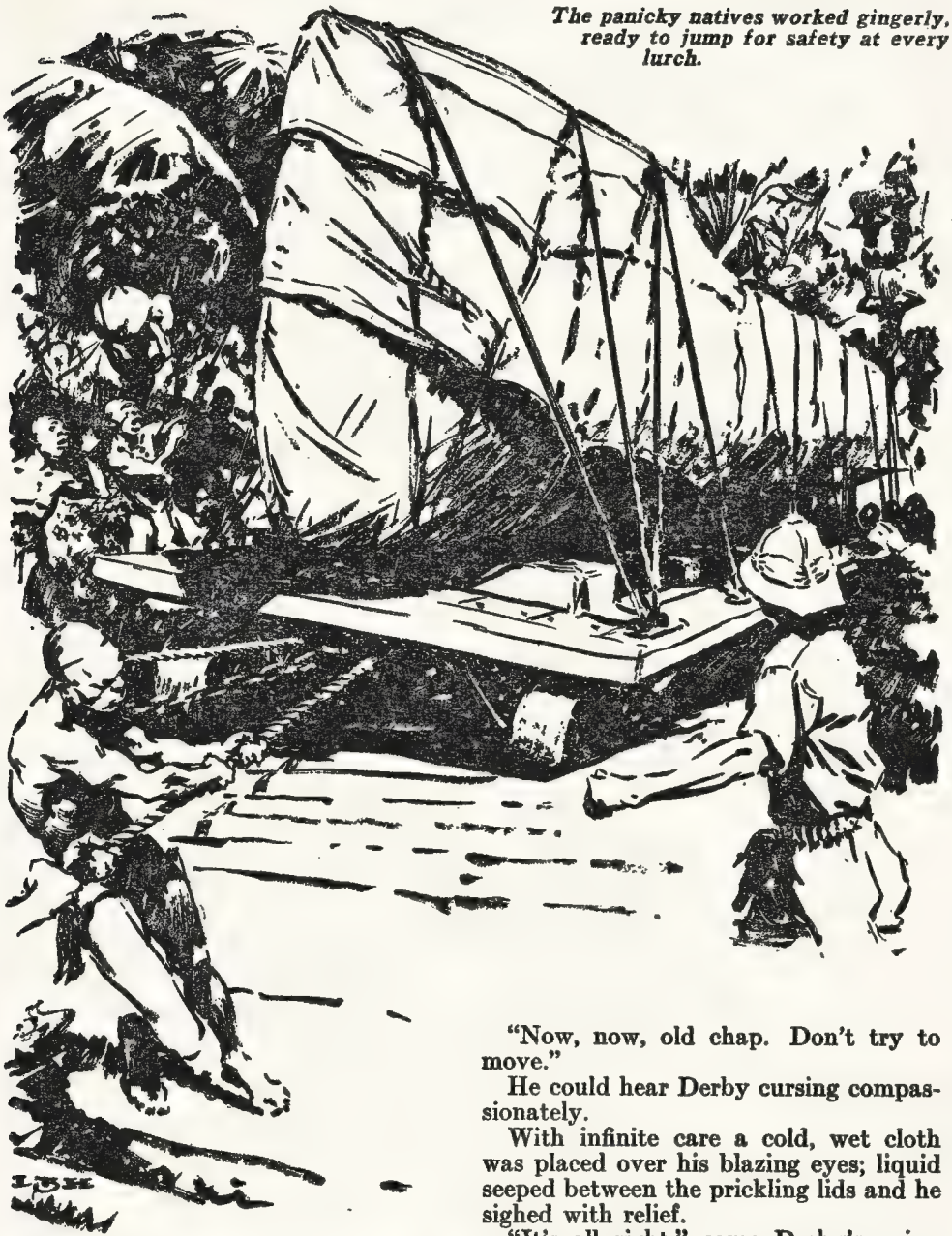
"Get—going."

"But Ba'as sick. Better we wait."

"Get—started."

Coward crawled out of bed and bathed his eyes until he was able to open them a little. Through a red mist he could faintly discern vague shapes that gradually became a line of carriers. He waited for the roar of engines and walked behind the Tweedledee, hanging on to the cradle. The sun poured down on him and he dragged his feet through thick sand that flashed and sparkled in his tortured eyes. He never knew how far he walked or the number of times he felt his way across swaying causeways after the great cradles. Once he stopped and drank a little water, soaked his handkerchief with it and held it over his face.

It was afternoon. He felt sick and a terrible weakness dragged at his feet. He thought he would sit down and rest a little, then catch up with the cradles. He let go his support and immediately dropped on his face in the hot sand. Somehow he managed to roll to the side of the road. Fighting against unconsciousness he heard the sound of the tractors receding in the distance. Suddenly he was afraid; they would leave



The panicky natives worked gingerly, ready to jump for safety at every lurch.

him; no one had noticed that he had stopped. Shouting hoarsely, he climbed to his feet and took a few steps along the trail. But it was too much; he dropped again.

The next thing he was conscious of was a cool dampness on his face. Groaning, he moved his head.

"Now, now, old chap. Don't try to move."

He could hear Derby cursing compassionately.

With infinite care a cold, wet cloth was placed over his blazing eyes; liquid seeped between the prickling lids and he sighed with relief.

"It's all right," came Derby's voice, surprisingly gentle, "We're at M'wendu Makou. How d'you feel?"

"Feel rotten. Can't see."

Something lifted his head and cool water entered his mouth. He gulped and tried to sit up.

"Here, whoa! Take it easy. Lie down again; you'll be all right."

He could open his eyes. He saw Derby bending over him, his bright hair outlined against a lantern.

"Wha—"

"Don't try to talk, you're all right, now. Look here, me lad, you'll have to take better care of yourself. Gave me an awful shock. Carriers came in two hours ago and we couldn't find you. Kaliki nearly went crazy. We dashed back and there you were, sprawled all over the road. Dammit, why didn't you tell me you hadn't goggles? You're snow blind from that damned mica. Fever too. I'll never forgive myself."

"It's—all right," whispered Coward. "Water."

"Try this."

Scalding whiskey and water dripped into his mouth.

"Swallow this quinine and aspirin. I'll pile some blankets on you."

He was too weak to object and raved deliriously when the whiskey took effect.

IN the morning he awakened, feeble but better. His eyes felt as if they had been boiled, but he could see.

"Fine scare you gave me, you silly ass," said Derby from beside his cot. "Look here, you be more careful. I can't do this job by myself." There was a grin that belied the sharpness of his tone.

Coward sat on his cot; he still felt shaky. He could see the tractors and cradles near a group of huts under guard of half a dozen natives. The cradles were hung with calabashes, drums, cans, canvas buckets, anything that would hold water. Derby walked among the carriers, hounding them off for more water. Great bundles of ox fodder stood beside the trail and gasoline drums were lashed to poles for carrying between two natives. Stacey walked past once or twice but did not address Coward.

"We'll have to stick together now," said Derby, coming over. "Road's bad ahead and there are grass fires. Smell the smoke? We'll start in the morning. Stacey can drive the ammunition truck; you ride Tweedledum and I'll walk behind to see none of the lads swipe any water."

By nightfall all was ready. There were over six hundred carriers, each carrying his food and water ration in addition to a sixty pound load. There were several scouts gone ahead to mark and arrange for water.

By morning Coward felt better, though far from strong. He watched Stacey start the truck and followed in the foremost cruiser. In a long file the carriers plodded through the dust with Derby, his helmet a little khaki blob in the distance, marching in the rear.

Coward blinked behind green goggles when the sun rose. His helmet was padded with a handkerchief. He watched a thin line of orange flame preceded by a wall of blue smoke that advanced through the grass a few miles away.

The oxen seemed to move with appalling slowness behind the tractors, their yokes dangling with loads, their drivers cracking their whips and singing cheerfully.

Suddenly there was a crash ahead and the truck seemed to topple forward on its hood. Stacey climbed from it, cursing bitterly. The tractors halted and carriers milled all over the trail. Coward descended and ran forward. One of the truck wheels had sunk into a deep hole.

"God help us if the axle's gone," panted Derby.

"Why the devil wasn't this trail properly mapped?" roared Stacey. "Here we are, the 22nd of August. Already two weeks out of Elizabethville, and not a hundred miles covered. We'll never get there."

"Keep your hair on," said Derby. "We'll manage all right. Rains don't commence before the beginning of November—unless they start early."

CHAPTER IV

"WHO CAN BUY LIFE?"

THEY struggled up the steepening hill, the oxen harnessed to the tractors to help them over the soft spots. Coward's eyes often turned to the plain below, where many clouds of smoke indicated fires. To the south east an immense black patch, miles in area, marked burned land. At noon they halted and

Coward watched with dismay as the drivers took container after container to water their thirsty beasts.

"Haven't seen any caches yet," said Derby. "There's only enough for one more watering. I'll send out more scouts."

After half an hour to rest the oxen, Derby gave the order to trek. The tractors and oxen struggled ahead, then the carriers and the two white men walking in the rear. It was too hot to talk. The drivers were quiet, the carriers no longer singing. Occasionally an ox bellowed resonantly in the afternoon silence. Above the bobbing headloads he could see the canvas covers of the cruisers swaying against the sky. He felt weak, but he hid that from Derby and plodded on, thirsty, but hesitating to drink the little that remained in his waterbottle.

The trail steepened suddenly and Derby called a halt to rest. Coward sank beneath a scraggy tree. Idly he kicked at the loose sand. Suddenly he recoiled as a dust colored, jointed scorpion materialized out of the dust and struck viciously at his boot. Frenziedly he jumped up, stamping on the evil, sparring thing until he shattered it into the ground. Then he leaned against the tree, trembling and biting his lip to avoid hysteria. Some of the carriers were watching, grinning, and he felt Derby's eyes on him. Dammit it! Why couldn't he be ready for such things?

They started again, the oxen surging wildly to aid the tractors up the slope. Coward was grateful that Derby went ahead to shout at them and he kept behind the dawdling carriers. The heat was awful. He could feel it burning through the thick quilted spine pad on his shirt. He moved his tongue and felt his lip crack. The carriers were straggling over several hundred yards and he hounded them like a collie, scolding at the rearmost ones. Then there was a long shout and away up the slope he made out the truck. In two hours the cradles were alongside and Coward sank beside the trail. Stacey was leaning in the shade of the truck, his face a bitter mask.

"Can't get up this damned hill," he snapped. "Been waiting for hours. What the devil delayed you?"

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"We stopped to play ring-a-rosie," said Derby.

"Look here—"

"Oh, for God's sake shut up!" Derby, his face murderous, toiled up the hill to see if any water had been cached there. The carriers herded about them, calabashes in their hands, muttering.

"See?" said Derby to Coward. "This is what being a god means. Those poor devils think we can give them as much water as they like."

"Well," snarled Stacey. "What shall we do?"

"We'd better stay until tomorrow. There's only enough water for one more ration. I've sent scouts ahead, but we can't expect them back for some hours."

"You know this country," sneered Stacey. "Why the hell didn't you arrange for water?"

"You're not a lot of help, you know," said Derby consideringly. "I wonder if you realize that, knowing this country and these people as I do, I could get you killed quite easily, and no one would be any the wiser."

"Why, you—you wouldn't—"

"I didn't say I would. But consider this, Stacey. So far you've been a beastly hindrance. I could justify myself for putting you out of the way."

"Look here, Coward," blustered Stacey. "You heard that. Put him under arrest."

Stacey drew his revolver.

Derby was walking to the edge of the road. He spoke over his shoulder.

"Don't make the mistake of pointing that thing at me," he said casually. "Some of my savage friends might not like it."

STACEY looked about him. The four Basutos were standing by, their eyes on him, and Kaliki had a rifle in his hands.

"Mutiny, that's what it is," stuttered Stacey. "You wait."

Derby was studying the plain through glasses.

"There might be a stream down there." He pointed to a line of green trees about four miles away across the burnt plain. "If so we can get enough to last another day we can carry on—I hope. Never saw such a drought." He ignored Stacey completely.

The Lt.-Commander climbed into the truck. They heard a clink of glass. Derby winked at Coward.

By the time the oxen were watered there was little for the carriers. They drank their meagre shares and shook their empty gourds. Derby chattered to them in their own dialect; they smiled wanly and went to crouch by their loads.

As night fell they saw strips of flame crossing the plain.

"Hope that fire doesn't come this way," muttered Derby, sucking an empty pipe. "This is lion country. If they're driven this way they might try for an ox or two. We'll keep careful watch tonight."

Stacey stepped down from the truck.

"Look here, Derby," he said. "I've decided to overlook that threat you made a little while ago. Tired, nervous, no doubt. Now what's the plan? What do we do to protect this ammunition?"

"I'll have fire trenches made."

Coward watched natives pile the gasoline drums about the truck, then cut a wide trench in the grass. There were some shouts down hill and the scouts toiled in to camp with calabashes of green, scummy water.

"Barely enough for the tractors," Derby groaned. "We'll have to go on short rations. There's no water for two days, and for tonight we'll have to keep this handy in case sparks get too close to that gasoline. We'll take turns guarding it."

Derby took first guard while Stacey and Coward turned in. Coward was awakened during the night by harsh roars down hill. He looked out to see the ox drivers replenishing great grass fires about the nervously milling beasts.

"Lions," said Derby.

There was a line of fire near the bottom of the hill, but Coward could not tell with what speed it was traveling.

"Turn in," suggested Derby. "I'll call you when your time comes. I don't think there's any danger."

Coward lay down again. He could smell smoke and hear the wings of birds disturbed by the fire.

He was shocked out of sleep by the report of a rifle. Scrambling outside, he heard deafening roars and the terrified bellowing of the oxen. Something blared up the hill and the beasts, bawling, broke through the ring of fires and plunged into the darkness.

"Head 'em off!" yelled Derby, firing again, and racing down hill after them. "Two of 'em. One chasin' the brutes down to the other. Get after 'em."

Drivers, spears in hands, tore into the darkness. Stacey bounded out of his tent, rifle in his fist.

"What the hell are you waiting for?" he roared. "Get after those damned oxen." He fired at a shadow crossing the road and raced after Derby.

Coward reached inside his tent, grabbed his rifle and followed. It was black outside the firelight but against the advancing flame from below he could see great shapes humping through the grass. Once he heard an agonized scream and the heavy roar of a lion. He heard natives shouting and once the reassuring call of Derby. Then he was alone. The tall grass cut off all view. He plunged downwards, then stopped, sliding on his heels, as from somewhere close ahead came a low, worrying growl. His heart slammed against his ribs as he tried to place the sound. Somewhere in the tangle a hungry lion crouched over its prey. The brute had scented him, for the growl sharpened to a snarl. There was stealthy movement in the dry grass, panic-stricken, he fired his rifle at it. Something roared and crashed away. He stumbled madly up hill, fighting the crippling grass, sobbing for breath until he reeled into camp. It was deserted.

Again, almost immediately, he recoiled as a massive, snorting shape hurtled past. Desperately he circled the maddened ox and tried to head it up hill. Somewhere a lion roared and there was a heart stopping scream as another brute was pulled down.

"Derby! Derby!" he shouted.

"What ho!" The steady voice was somewhere above him. Derby sounded as cool as though he were shooting partridge. "How goes it? Any luck?"

"No." He felt ashamed of his panic. "Hold on a sec."

There was a crashing and Derby burst through the tangle. His face was torn with thorns and his blue eyes sparkled with excitement.

"Here's a go!" he panted. "Look here, I'll round up the boys and guard the road. You start a fire; it won't pass the fire trench, but it'll drive the oxen back. Where's Stacey?"

"Don't know. Stacey! Stace-e-ey!"

"Ahoy!" came a faint hail, followed by a rifle shot.

"Go down and tell him or he'll think we fired the grass in order to cook him."

Laughing hysterically, Coward pushed through the grass. The fire seemed to be veering away from the road. He yelled and Kaliki burst through the bushes.

"Make fire below," he ordered. "Drive oxen up hill."

"*Ya, Ba'as.*"

There was a crackle of flame as the Basuto raced along the bottom of the hill. Natives raced after plunging beasts and Coward, shouting, made for Stacey's replies to his shouts.

"Come on, up hill," he puffed. "They're firing the grass to drive the cattle back."

"What of it?" Stacey said calmly. "I'll stop here and try for a lion."

"What?" Bitterly Coward envied his calm. "We had better get up the hill."

"Run along then," sneered the older man. "It's a bit dangerous here."

"But you'll be caught in the fire."

"Ah! You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

COWARD turned and started up the hill. He heard Stacey following him. A broad belt of flame followed them and terrified little animals pushed through the grass beside Coward. The thought of snakes chilled him, but he forced his way, followed by billowing smoke through which he could see humped shapes and hear their frightened lowing.

At last he stumbled across the fire trench where hundreds of screeching natives ran to catch each ox as it broke into the open. Blackened, ripped by thorns, Derby grabbed at the plunging animals, yelling for the drivers to secure them.

It was bright sunlight before the last

of the animals were made fast. The fire burned itself out at the trench and Stacey stood guard over the water.

"Fifteen beasts gone," counted Derby, dabbing a deep scratch in his face. "Hey, Kaliki. Send the men to find the dead beasts and tell them they can have the meat."

"*Ya, Ba'as.*"

Yelling wildly, the natives plunged down the hill.

"We'll rest a few hours," said Derby. "The meat will satisfy them for a while. Then we'll have to give them the rest of the water and get on. I'll go ahead with fifty men and see if I can't dig up some water."

By early afternoon the men were all sitting about their fires, full of ox meat and fairly contented. Derby took fifty of them and harangued the others.

"There is little water," he told them. "I go with these men to find more. You must follow the white man until we meet you."

They grunted their acquiescence and Coward watched twenty oxen harnessed to the truck. They dragged it over the steep part of the hill. Ahead it was level for miles, then rose sharply again. He distributed the rest of the water and gave the order to march.

They followed the trail for hours, crossing four causeways. Coward walked ahead, chewing a bit of grass. His mouth felt like flannel. All about him he could see hills and valleys shimmering in the heat waves. Only ahead did the landscape raise itself above the horizon. He wondered how they would get the cradles over the mountain. Were they over the worst of the journey? The past night with all its fears came to him again and his head hung as he trudged through the thick, hot dust. Everything seemed against him—heat, lack of water, animals, everything. It seemed no longer worth while to go on. Yet, somewhere ahead Derby was searching in that arid desert for water for them all. Derby, a man like himself, was up against the same things. Coward jerked up his head and tried to whistle.

Just before dark they came to a wide gully with a ramshackle causeway over it. It had been damaged by the truck but Stacey had not stopped to repair it. It was pitch dark before they were over, and Coward decided to camp. During the night he heard shouting and found Kaliki with an ox whip standing over a group of carriers.

"They fear go on, *Ba'as,*" he reported.

"They'll have water soon," Coward muttered. "There is no water behind us. If they run they will die. Water tomorrow." He hoped he was telling the truth.

IN the morning he tried to eat some biscuits but his throat, dry and raw, refused them. There were tins of fruit in his chop box, but he dared not open the luscious things under the thirsty eyes of the blacks. He gave orders to start. The oxen strove weakly against their yokes, milling and staggering, while their drivers' whips cracked over their dusty backs. The tractors clattered as the great driving wheels bit into the sand and the cradles groaned after them.

Somehow they reached the top of a steep slope and by afternoon they were again toiling along a level stretch. Coward's heart sank as he saw the peak of the mountain ahead. It would be impossible to get over that, he was sure. It was late afternoon when Kaliki, marching ahead, gave a hoarse shout. Coward ran to him and waved his helmet madly at the sight of Derby a few hundred yards away.

"What ho!" he called. "Wa-a-ter!"

Behind him a line of blacks, gourds on their heads, stood beside the road. The oxen bellowed madly and struggled towards them.

"Hold on," yelled Derby. "There's only enough for one watering. Down loads, and put one man on each beast. See that none's spilled. Men get theirs afterwards."

Each brute received about a quart of fluid, sucking it up greedily and goring at the men for more. In a pathetically short time the men had swallowed their few drops and there was none left.

"I've sent ahead for more, but I doubt if we'll get any for two days," muttered Derby. "Come on—we need those oxen again."

Forty oxen dragged the truck over the

slope and returned for the cradles. But their hooves splayed and slid through the sand. Nor could the tractors budge an inch.

"All men on ropes," called Derby.

Piling their loads, the natives tailed on to new lines hastily unpacked.

"Now. He-e-eave—ho!" bellowed Derby.

Men and beasts tugged until their tongues hung out. The tractors edged forward a few inches then dropped back into deep grooves in the sand, their wheels spinning helplessly.

"Come on," yelled Derby. "Are you children? Heave!"

Again they tried, muscles bulging under their skins, eyes dull with effort; but the cradles sank back.

"Here's a go!" muttered Derby, mopping his face.

They stared at the cruisers, massive and immovable, their canvas covers, thick with mica-filled dust, glittering in the sunlight. About them the natives dropped exhausted and the oxen sank to their knees, blowing.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" Stacey called from the hilltop.

"A miracle," returned Derby. "Got one?"

"You've men and oxen," Stacey ran down to them. "What the devil more d'you want?"

"They're too tired to get them up this hill. We'll have to wait until they're rested."

"Rested! The damned lazy swine—" Stacey snatched a whip from a driver and began laying about him. "Get up, you black scum," he screamed.

The rawhide caught some oxen and they lumbered to their feet.

"Get on, you beasts," he raged, beside himself. "I'll teach you—."

Blacks ran in every direction from the flying lash. Stacey pursued them until at last he stood alone in the trail, cursing as they fled far down the hill.

"Now, my respected superior officer, you've done it," said Derby grimly.

STACEY turned and looked at him. Coward thought his eyes seemed filmed over.

"What d'you mean?" His voice was thick.

"You're responsible for getting these launches over the mountain," said Derby evenly. "But you've driven away six hundred men; look at 'em, spread over the whole damned landscape. I don't know if they'll come back; don't blame 'em if they stay away."

"Ah, they'll come back," Stacey sneered uncertainly and walked up the hill.

"Looks as if we've failed," said Derby, a crooked smile on his lips. "We'll have to wait for more oxen, and God knows how long that'll take. I don't see how we can get through before the rains."

Coward started up the hill.

"Where are you going?"

"Just taking a look around."

"Got any ideas?"

"Not sure."

They reached the top of the steep part and a plateau stretched before them.

"This is the summit. If we could only reach it."

Coward stared about him in the twilight. Already, far below, he caught the wink of camp-fires, where groups of the carriers were trying to make themselves comfortable. Beside the road at the crest of the hill a lignum vitae tree spread tortured branches over the road. Opposite it an outcrop of rock jutted from the ground and a few yards along the plateau were a clump of trees. Coward looked down hill.

"Only two hundred feet," he mused. "Look, Derby, that ground beside the road, to the left, is pretty clear; gives us nearly twenty yards width."

"What of it?"

"Look here, d'you think you can get those natives back?"

"I can try; might get most of 'em here by morning. I told Stacey they were gone, to teach him a lesson."

"Try, will you?"

Derby went down to the cradles and called for Kaliki. The Basuto emerged from behind a tractor and Derby whispered to him for some moments, then returned.

"He's going with his pals to try and persuade 'em to come back," he reported. "I think they'll be here by morning, with any luck."

The tents were up and they retired to them. During the night Coward, listening to the night noises, heard the murmur of voices and the lowing of cattle. A raging thirst tortured him and he could not sleep for impatience to try his plan.

AT dawn the natives stood nervously about the tents.

"What the hell do they want?" roared Stacey. "They deserted once—let 'em stay away now."

"D'you mind if we have another shot at getting over this hill?" asked Coward.

"You know damned well you can't do it."

"Nevertheless we're going to try," said Derby. "And God help you if you try to stop us. What's the plan, Coward?"

"Get all ropes, tow chains and blocks and tackle."

Coward anchored the tree to the clump of trees behind it and carried tow chains from the tree to the outcrop of rock across the trail. He attached a double sheave block to the tow chains, midway between the tree and the rock.

"Bring up the oxen, both teams," he called.

He threaded ropes through the block and sent natives to drag the free ends down hill to a cradle.

"Make the other ends fast to the ox traces."

The mystified drivers in-spanned their oxen in a long double file.

"Turn them down hill, parallel to the trail."

"What the devil?" said Derby.

"Get all the men to shove behind that cruiser."

He hounded them into place.

"All set?" shouted Coward. "Drive down hill, to the left."

"*Hough! Voetsack!*"

The oxen leaned under their yokes and strained down the slope. The cradle jerked, lurched and rolled slowly up the hill, counterweighted by the oxen. Natives, yelling with excitement, shoved behind the cradle, ready with logs to chock the wheels in case the rope broke.

"Oh! Good stuff," cheered Derby. "Marvelous! My God! I hope that tree holds out."

Its knotty trunk groaned under the tremendous weight, but the ropes held and in half an hour the first cradle was on level ground.

By mid-morning they were under way over fairly level ground covered with yellow grass and small trees. Several times they saw antelope flitting to cover. Stacey rode ahead with the truck.

"I'll bring back any water the scouts find," he promised. "Otherwise I'll try and get through to Sankisia."

"Thanks, bloody!" called Derby. "Don't tire yourself out."

He strode ahead with the carriers while Coward walked in the rear with the ox-drawn cradles. By noon they had made fair distance, but the oxen were lagging from thirst and Derby reported the carriers openly grumbling. He dropped back to walk with Coward. His face seemed peaked and he halted to rest frequently, hanging to a cradle as he slouched along behind it. Coward, watching him, made conversation, although speech was difficult. The older man was clinging with both hands to a strap on the cradle, his head bent.

"I'll go ahead and see if Stacey is in sight," said Coward. "He might be on his way back with water."

"Oh, he'll be along," said Derby in a strange voice. "I'll have some sandwiches and tea and ices and roast beef and bunches of flowers—"

Coward stared in dismay. Derby was looking straight ahead, his eyes burning, face yellow and congested beneath its tan. His lips moved.

"What's up?" Coward demanded. "You all right?"

"Eh?" Derby turned empty eyes. "Nice weather. I always did like Brighton."

"Look here, pull yourself together." Coward gripped his wrist; it was dry and hot as fire. He half carried him to the side of the trail and sat him down.

"Get water," he shouted to Kaliki, peering fearfully over his shoulder.

"Water, no live."

Shocked, he looked at Derby, who was muttering aimlessly and scrabbling with his fingers in the dust. His helmet slid off and Coward found a rent in it.

"Sunstroke," he muttered. "Kaliki!"

"*Ba'as.*"

"Get up, you scum!" he screamed. "Get on those ropes!"

"Major Derby sick," he explained. "Bring four men to carry him."

Coward halted the rear cradle and with wooden stanchions lashed together a passable stretcher. Hooding it with canvas, he laid Derby on it. Four carriers piled their loads on a cradle and hoisted the sick man on their shoulders.

THE cavalcade continued its snail like progress; the oxen lowing and trying to stray in search of water. From time to time Coward heard Derby groan, and cursed miserably. Where the hell was Stacey? Then he remembered the tins of fruit in his chop box. Opening one, he drained the juice into Derby's mouth. The jaws snapped at it and he held the sweet, sticky fruit between the sucking lips until it was all gone. He dropped the tin and groaned as two natives fought for it, licking the moisture from its edge.

At sunset he made out some figures far ahead.

"Water," he croaked, stumbling towards them.

"No water."

Sick with disappointment, he waited while the groaning oxen passed him and Kaliki, marching behind them, wagged his head hopelessly. Night fell and grass fires made the still air a furnace. Lightning flickered to the east.

"Better camp, *Ba'as*," counselled the Basuto. "Sand storm come soon."

The dawn was hotter than anything he had experienced. The sky was copper colored and the sun glowed like a coal. Lightning flashed and dust devils whirled in the trail. The natives peered apprehensively at a slate colored cloud that was rushing at them with incredible swiftness.

"Tornado? Rain?" he asked Kaliki.

"No, *Ba'as*. Sand."

Thunder crashed nearer and the oxen stamped, hunching their backs towards the cloud. Carriers huddled in the lee of the cruisers as a hot blast of wind seared their lungs. Lightning blazed overhead and thunder exploded. Then the wind came and sand, hot as coals, lashed them. Coward ducked into Derby's tent and laced it shut, but the sand seeped through the flies and filled his throat. Covering the sick man's face, he strug-

gled outside. Flying particles stung his arms and he gasped with the raging panic of suffocation. His parched throat contracted and he coughed until every breath was agony. The flying sand seemed to strip the very flesh from his bones and above the hissing thrash of wind he could hear Derby's groans. Lying close to the tent, his hair stirred as he heard the sick man singing feebly—little songs he must have learned forty years before.

Coward tried to get to the cradles. He could not see; the world was blotted out by a gray, stinging mist. Something caught his foot and he dropped, creeping for shelter beside an ox.

He must have lost consciousness, for when he lifted his head it was dark and the wind was dropping. Kaliki had lit a fire behind a cradle and by its light he saw the oxen struggling to their feet and shaking dust and sand from their backs. Wearily Coward looked in at Derby; he was sleeping. Coward dropped like a log beside him.

At dawn he crept out of the tent. The carriers were hunched together, their faces gray with dust and drawn with thirst.

"Come on," he croaked. "Get going. Water ahead."

IT WAS dark when they reached the village, a large collection of grass and mud huts arranged in circles off the trail. The truck stood in the roadway with Stacey beside it.

"No water," he stated. "Where the hell's Derby? Make him talk to these blacks."

"Derby's sick; can't talk."

"What the hell! Rout him out. Make him talk, dammit!" raged Stacey. "I've begged them. I told the chief I'd buy his damned water; he won't give me a drop. I waited for you. We'll shoot the devils down until they give us something to drink."

"Wait."

The carriers had dropped their loads all over the trail and were shouting to the villagers. But sulky looking men ganged before the huts, long spears in their hands, and dogs ran snapping at the thirsty oxen.

"Well, what are you waiting for now?"

"Wait," said Coward again. "Derby can't help us."

Coward called the chief. A tall, slit-eyed native in faded cotton waistcloth lounged forward. He shook his shaven head vehemently as Kaliki interpreted.

"He say, no water," said the Basuto. "But he lie. Oxen smell it."

The beasts were stamping, bellowing and struggling to get into the village. But by now there were dense crowds of armed natives, clad in stinking skins, glowering at the white men. The carriers begged them, but it was easy to see they feared the spearmen. Women, shaven-headed, with great clusters of jangling wire rings in their ears, shuffled from the huts, their filed teeth glinting in the watch fire light.

"Tell them to bring water for a sick man," said Coward.

"They say they no get water for theyselves."

"Tell them we will pay."

"Chief say, who can buy life?"

"Will he let a white man die?"

The chief shrugged and moved away.

"What will he take for water?" Coward demanded desperately.

Kaliki talked, then turned an enraged face.

"He say, if you give him all oxen he will get water for all men. He say, his men are more than we; they are armed. They will kill all and take the oxen if we try to steal their water."

"There you are," raged Stacey. "Get your rifle. I'll kill him."

"Wait, let me think."

"You're afraid, you damned coward, you're afraid," jeered Stacey. "You'll let a fist full of filthy black boys bluff you. Well, by God! I won't."

He ducked into the truck but Coward raced after him. Stacey halted, rifle in hand as Coward's revolver jabbed into his stomach.

"If you make one move towards those natives with that gun, I'll shoot you down," said Coward earnestly. "If you kill one of them, they'll murder the lot of us; our men can't fight; they're scared stiff. Listen to me, Stacey. If we do frighten them off, we'll never find water. The village is on a plateau; the water

must be somewhere down the mountain. The only way we can get any is for them to take us to it. Do you understand?"

"I understand this," he whispered. "You drew a weapon on your superior officer on active service. I'll have you court-martialled if ever we get back."

Coward swung away and went to Derby. He was unconscious. What to do? Dared he attack them? Would the carriers back them up against the grinning mob of spearmen? They were crowding nearer, their slashed faces triumphant. He dragged a handkerchief from his belt to mop his wet hands. There was an exclamation and a woman pushed forward to touch the square of gaudy bandana.

"My God!" snapped Coward. "Look here, Kaliki! Tell the women I'll give handkerchiefs, like this, for water. Quick. Tell them I've got thousands to give for water."

Kaliki shouted. The women yelled back, pointing to Coward and the handkerchief he was spreading for their benefit. Some of them ran to the huts and a horde of screaming females, folding skins over their pendulous breasts, bounded out and ganged, screeching and laughing, about the white man. The savages ordered them back but they shoved them aside, shrilling like monkeys.

"Water for men and oxen," croaked Coward. "For each woman a fine handkerchief."

THE spearmen beat at them but the women fought back, scolding excitedly and ran to their huts. They came out with clay pots, gourds and gasoline tins, and waving skinny arms, trotted off into the darkness, some carrying torches. The carriers made to follow them, but the villagers rushed them, spears poised to stab.

"Women may go, but if you men follow there will be killing," howled Kaliki, fighting them back.

"Well, that's that," sighed Coward, sitting down. "Kaliki, put guards on the oxen, in case these beauties try to steal them."

"Ya, *Ba'as.*"

"Your careful methods seem to work sometimes," said Stacey thinly.

The villagers hung about the camp, glowering covetously at the cattle which tugged to escape their yokes. But the drivers held them to prevent stampede.

"How far is the water?" demanded Stacey.

"They no tell; they fear we take all," said Kaliki.

Coward looked in at Derby and fed him the last tin of fruit.

"—Ho!" he mumbled. "Water."

"I know, we'll have some soon. Try to sleep, old man."

"Head aches."

"What the devil's matter with him?" grunted Stacey.

"Sunstroke, and he's damned sick."

He looked up at the sky. Those damned dust storms meant something. Rain couldn't be far off, he reasoned. And rain meant ruin of their plans. Funny, if it rained now, they'd be saved from death by thirst. But if it kept on raining, they'd never get through. Head on his knees he drifted into exhausted sleep. He was awakened by Kaliki.

"Tell them to go away," he groaned.

"There's no water. Dammit! Can't they see that?"

"They go kill oxen, drink blood, eat beef."

Coward picked up his rifle and reached for Derby's, which he handed to Kaliki. He walked to the oxen and his face was like that of a demon in the firelight.

"Tell them that I will kill any man who touches the oxen," he said quietly. "Tell them that any man who wakes Major Derby will be flogged. Tell them to go to hell!" He advanced on the nearest carrier and slapped his face. "Go on, you swine," he sobbed. "Back to your fire."

The man did not move.

CHAPTER V

UNCHARTED COURSE

BEHIND the carrier he could see other natives advancing slowly, muttering, and the firelight glinted on knives in their hands. He heard Kaliki's rifle click as he swung the muzzle to cover them. Then—

"See, *Ba'as.* See!"

Kaliki pointed over the heads of the mutineers. Far away, small pin points of light bobbed and disappeared across the plateau.

"Water come!"

"Wah!" The carriers wheeled, stood at gaze, then, shouting, ran for their gourds.

"Phew!" breathed Coward. "Keep them together somehow, Kaliki. We've got to water the oxen first or they'll stampede." He ran to his tent and changed his rifle for a revolver which he stuck in his belt to give his hands full play. "Get them in line," he ordered, returning. "Tell them no man drinks until the oxen are watered."

Kaliki danced like a madman before the blacks, shoving, beating at them until they stood shouting and waving their gourds in a long row. The oxen had struggled to their feet and were straining in their yokes, bawling and hooking at their drivers. The lights came nearer and at last women shuffled down the trail, a long line of them, gourds, cans and clay pots on their heads.

Kaliki jerked them into place before the animals and held the gourds while the beasts sucked up the water.

The carriers watched like hawks as the precious liquid disappeared. Then Kaliki brought a gourd to Coward. He grabbed it, then saw the glassy stare in the Basuto's eyes. The carriers were watching dumbly, licking their thick, parched lips while the oxen sucked their wet muzzles, belching as the water quenched their dehydrated bodies.

Ashamed suddenly, Coward handed back the gourd.

"Give the men two cups each," he ordered. "Then there must be enough for the sick white man."

Filters were filled and he carried a soaked towel into Derby's tent and laid it on his head. The sick man sighed with relief and his eyes opened. One thin hand rose to touch the towel and he sucked avidly at a corner of it.

"Hold on," said Coward softly. "Little at a time."

He dripped water from a filter between the gummy lips and Derby, whining like a hurt animal, gulped painfully.

"Softly, softly. There." Coward gave him a little more and watched agony leave the bloodshot eyes. "Look after him, Kaliki," he said and went out.

"I fit drink, *Ba'as?*" asked the Basuto.

He turned, shocked.

"You haven't—" Tears filled his eyes. "Here, Kaliki." He poured water from the filter. "Drink. Why didn't you drink before?"

"I wait for my *Ba'as,*" said the Basuto, saluting with the cup.

"So? Am I your *Ba'as?*"

"*Ya Ba'as.*"

Coward felt himself blush, and went out.

"After your friends have finished drinking," said a hoarse whisper. "May I have some water?"

"Yes, sir. There's some in your filter," said Coward.

"You've become damned polite, all of a sudden," snarled Stacey.

"Cheerio," said Coward, pouring himself a cup. He raised it to his lips and caught the eyes of several carriers who stood about the tent. He fought an impulse to gulp the liquid into his aching throat. By God! No! he told himself.

Those natives thought something of him. Deliberately he sipped the water, slowly and delicately as though savoring some exotic liqueur, while each drop cooled his cracked tongue. He let the water run as slowly as possible down his throat, eyes starting from his head with the effort it cost to drink slowly. He looked up from the cup sighing with delight. Then he was conscious of great hunger and an overpowering lassitude.

Stacey was drinking greedily beside him, choked with the water. He turned his head to look in at Derby. He was sleeping. Then the women clustered about him, chattering like magpies, their clawlike hands begging and plucking at him. Behind them their men stalked, shaking their spears at the chattering carriers.

Coward went to the heap of head loads and with difficulty picked out cases of trade goods. Kaliki marshalled the excited women and Coward handed out 150 handkerchiefs, one to each of them, and dawn broke as they ran yelling with delight to their huts.

He was staggering to his tent. He had not noticed the approaching grumble of thunder, but black clouds massed overhead and there was a metallic taste in the air.

"Secure the beasts before the sand comes," he called to Kaliki and fell across his cot.

THE tent stirred to a hot wind and, groaning, he rolled over to lace the entrance. There was a deafening clap of thunder and lightning bathed the camp in lambent flame. A whispering grew to a roar as the storm advanced across the dry grass. Suddenly there were hysterical yells from the carriers. The oxen bellowed. Coward put his head out of the tent, into a deluge of rain!

Stripping his clothes, Coward stepped outside and stood naked while fresh, cool water washed the dust and dried sweat from his aching body. He began to grin, then chuckled, and suddenly was screaming, tears mingling with the blessed rain on his haggard face.

For minutes he stood soaking up the moisture, then with an effort he controlled himself and replenished the wet towel on Derby's head. Then he dried himself and fell into dead slumber beside the sick man's cot.

He awakened about noon, cool, refreshed and hungry. Derby seemed better; his temperature was down and he was able to eat a little.

"Got a frightful head," he complained. "Where are we?"

Coward described the village.

"Kadule," Derby told him. "I'll get up."

"No, stay here for a while. You aren't going to walk just yet."

The trail was a morass. Oxen, lively now, browsed in the coarse grass. Carriers cheerfully strapped their loads, Kaliki and his three Basutos ranging up and down the lines shouting jovially at them. The villagers, their women preening themselves with their handkerchiefs, watched silently from their dripping huts. Stacey stepped out of his tent; he was unshaven, and his eyes were bloodshot.

"Fine show you put on, Coward," he said. "No wonder you wouldn't let me attack those damned natives. You knew it was going to rain."

"Oh, for God's sake," stuttered Coward.

Coward fitted a piece of canvas under Derby's broken helmet and gave him some tea.

"It's been raining."

"Yes."

Derby tried to lift himself.

"Wet season—early. Must get through —before—"

"I know. We're starting now."

By evening they reached the edge of the plateau and camped.

"Sorry—such a nuisance," whispered Derby as Coward helped him to bed.

"Don't worry; you'll be all right in a day or so. How far is it to Sankisia—we're at the edge of the plateau?"

"Two — three days. Depends — on road."

By morning the cradles had sunk up to their hubs and the men were busy for an hour digging them out. They were rolling by eight and Coward with Derby's hammock walked in the rear. Moisture dripped from overhead leaves as they entered a belt of forest and the

trail descended tortuously. Before them the deep tracks of Stacey's truck cut into the slimy mud and Coward ran ahead as he saw the cradles slewing and bogging in swampy stretches of path. That day they travelled less than five miles, the carriers trailing on to ropes and snubbing the great cradles down steep slimy inclines. That night Coward shivered with ague and hastily swallowed quinine. Derby was resting easily, anxious to get up.

Next day they penetrated deeper into the forest. It was almost dark, although Coward could see the yellow leaves far above filtering the sun rays. Once he halted, appalled, as great, gray shapes crossed the trail ahead. The oxen halted, blowing in alarm and the carriers dropped their loads, ready to run.

He stared about him; his rifle was on one of the cradles. Kaliki, bearing it crept through the line of silent carriers.

"Shoot, *Ba'as*, plenty beef," he whispered.

COWARD watched the elephants. There was one great bull, his enormous ears flapping and mighty brown stained tusks sweeping the bush on each side of him. With shaking fingers, Coward slid a cartridge out of his belt. It seemed impossible that that tiny scrap of nickel could kill several tons of living brute. What if they charged? What if they stampeded beasts and men? He jammed the cartridge back in his belt and breathlessly watched until the herd lumbered unconcernedly into the depths of the forest.

"Come on, get moving," he said shakily.

On the fourth of September they reached cultivated plots of land in the forest. There were a few villages and the natives came out, grinning, to watch the thin-faced, sombre-eyed man trudging at the head of the long lines of oxen.

The following day they came out of the bush. Ahead the trail was wider and dry as dust. There had been no rain there.

"We'll be fine now," he told Derby.

"Good. Sankisia only—few miles."

Just before dusk Coward nearly fainted at the toot of an engine whistle.

"Hear it?" he laughed.

"Get up tomorrow," decided Derby.

They marched the last miles by torchlight; the carriers chanting happily and tapping the loads of the men ahead in rhythm to their steps. Then Coward saw lights ahead and halted at a small construction camp at the head of fifteen miles of narrow gauge that finished at Bukama on the Lualaba river.

Stacey strolled out of a bark hut.

"Took your time, didn't you?" he observed.

Coward kept his temper.

"Would you like to know how Derby is?" he asked.

"Oh. How is he?"

"He's resting, a little better I think. I don't know how you got that truck down the mountain, but we had practically to carry the cruisers down. We're damned lucky to be here at all."

Stacey grunted.

"Well, watch your step here; there are a number of Belgian concession men here. They're not government agents. These concessionaires rent vast tracts of land from the government and they're allowed to get what they can from it. They supply their own native police and troops. They don't like us; been asking a lot of questions. There may be a few Germans among them; I don't know. Remember, we're here to start a river service; so be careful whom you talk to."

Germans! Good Lord! Coward had forgotten completely about them.

He watched the loads stacked and saw Derby into bed, loaded with quinine. His own tent was put up; he dropped across his cot and slept.

He was awakened by his servant with a cup of tea. He got up, stretching aching limbs. Phew! He felt rotten, unshaven, unbathed, still dressed in the filthy clothing he had worn for the past week. He looked out. They were in a clearing in a mahogany forest. A shunting engine and three small flat cars stood on a narrow track. Half a dozen white men, bearded, in sweat-soaked shorts and slacks, strolled inquisitively about the camp, peeping under the cradle covers, staring curiously at the loads.

Stacey pounded over to them.

"These blasted swine refuse to take the cruisers through," he announced peevishly.

"What?"

"It's true. They promised to take them four days ago, but the leader, over there, just said he can't manage it. Can we go by road?"

Derby looked over to where the group of whites giggled among themselves.

"No," he said slowly. "There are two wide streams which we never could ford."

He sat down suddenly on a box.

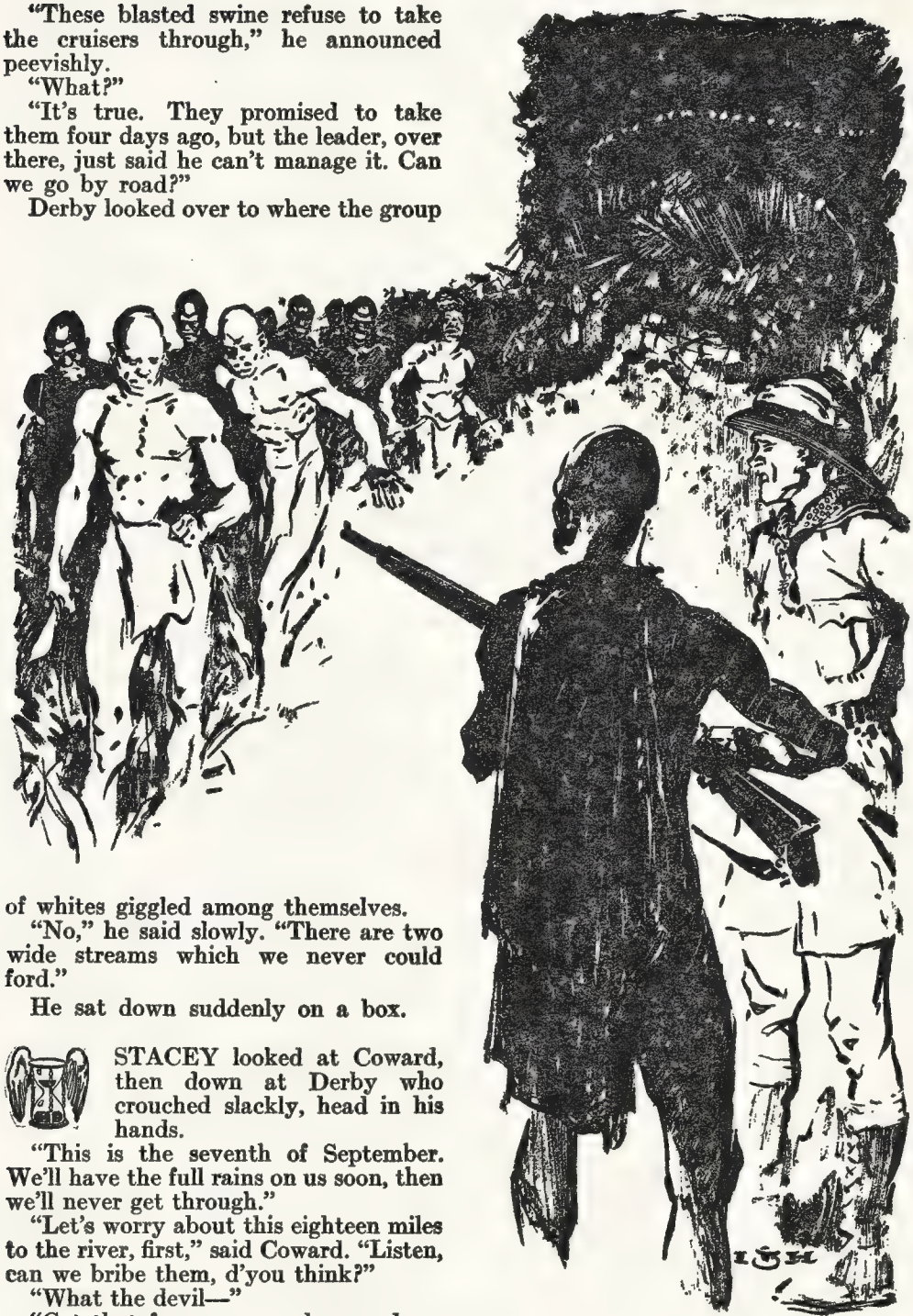
STACEY looked at Coward, then down at Derby who crouched slackly, head in his hands.

"This is the seventh of September. We'll have the full rains on us soon, then we'll never get through."

"Let's worry about this eighteen miles to the river, first," said Coward. "Listen, can we bribe them, d'you think?"

"What the devil—"

"Get that foreman over here and see if we can't persuade him. We don't need the truck from here on; let's offer him



"Tell them I will kill any man who touches the oxen!"

that. He can make thousands of francs from the natives with it."

Stacey called and a ragged mustached individual slouched up.

"Dites," said Coward. "We've got to get to the river. Won't you help us?"

The man shrugged.

"'Ow you can do that?" He winked across at his friends. "Thees sheep is too big to go on flat cars. You wait till we build beeg railroad?"

"Oh, damned funny," growled Stacey.

The foreman grinned and shrugged again.

"Look here," Coward said suddenly. "We won't need that truck. Lend us the engine and cars. We won't try to put the cruisers on them, and we'll give you the truck—and gasoline too."

"*Comment?*"

Coward repeated.

"What's the idea?" Stacey wanted to know.

"If we can get the cradles jacked up on the rails, maybe we can sled them to Bukama."

"Well, what d'you say?" Stacey snapped.

The Belgian hesitated, then agreed.

"How are you going to do it?"

"We'll drag the cradles over the rails, remove the wheels and lower them on to thick wooden ties. Then the men can walk beside the track and steady them."

They left the Belgian dancing excitedly about his truck, and in-spanned the oxen. After an hour one cradle was above the rails, its wheels outside the narrow gauge.

"Now. Thick ties under the axles."

They were lashed in place, the wheels removed and the cradle lowered until it rested on the rails.

"Make fast to the locomotive," ordered Stacey.

Tow chains rattled as they were secured to a coupling. The Belgians stood around laughing to each other and calling advice.

"Ahead slow."

They watched breathlessly while the engine rattled as though it would fall to pieces; steam leaked from a dozen joints and the wheels raced.

"Sand."

Kaliki threw handsful, and with sparks flying the little locomotive moved jerkily forward.

"It'll never move both."

"We'll ballast it with the three loaded flats," said Derby. "We'll have to make two journeys, I'm afraid. I'll go with the first."

"No," said Stacey. "You stay here and rest. I'll go ahead and send the engine back for you. I'll take that Kaliki fellow to guard the amm—stuff out of the truck."

By afternoon the engine was ready. Its three cars piled with cases marked machinery which the Belgians had suspiciously watched transferred from the truck and the cradle. Ten men walked each side of the cradle.

"Take four extra boys with mud," counselled Derby.

"What the devil for?" demanded Stacey from the engine.

"Grease the rails."

Great pans of slush were smeared on the metals and the train moved forward fairly easily.

"Keep her at about three miles an hour," suggested Derby.

"All right. Here we go," called Stacey. "See you tomorrow. Hope you feel better then."

Open-mouthed, they watched the fantastic train pull out.

"You don't think he's got softening of the brain, do you?" Derby asked.

"Don't know," Coward grinned. "Perhaps he's seen the error of his ways."

"I doubt it."

He turned back to his tent.

"Call up the boys, will you, Coward?" he asked. "I'll pay 'em off and send the oxen back."

Battered helmet on the back of his head, he sat at a camp table and gave each of the six hundred natives chits that could be exchanged for food, goods or money at the labor recruiting agency at Fungurume. The ox drivers took their papers and the whole gang, singing lustily started back over the trail, the oxen plodding ahead.

"That's that," sighed Derby. "Hope they get over the plateau safely." He smiled at Coward. "The worst of the job's over," he said. "The river may be

difficult, but we've passed enough to drive people mad; I can't think of anything worse ahead."

IT WAS the following afternoon before the train returned, its driver reporting difficulty on some of the turns. By dusk the cradle was in place, loads on the flats and Coward gave a few drums of gasoline to the foreman.

"You'd better be comfortable," he said to Derby, and insisted on uncovering the Tweedledee and persuading the sick man to sleep in its tiny cabin. "I'll use one of the huts," he told him. "So we can get going the first thing in the morning."

He watched Derby go to sleep, then went over to a hut. The Belgians crowded around, their eyes greedy at the sight of a whiskey bottle. He gave them some drinks and quickly found himself the bosom friend of them all.

"*Mais, mon ami,*" said one. "You will nevaire get down river. Too dry. No rain yet. Better wait two month. Then everyt'ing all right—if you get permission."

"Permission?"

"*B'en oui.* The Kabolo concession controls the river."

They left when they could see no more whiskey and he turned in.

At dawn the train started through the misty forest, Coward on a flat and the Basutos walking with the carriers beside the track. They stopped twice to renew ties that were worn through and darkness overtook them some miles out of Bukama.

The night was torture; insects whined viciously. No matter how he arranged his net they penetrated and he scratched their minute stings incessantly. Several times he was startled out of uneasy sleep by crashings in the forest and he heard the driver cursing monotonously in his cab. Kaliki had lit a smudge fire and his men crouched around it, huddled in their blankets. In the morning he looked in at Derby. The sick man went into peals of feeble laughter.

"Now, now," soothed Coward, horribly scared. "I'll get you some brandy."

"No," giggled Derby. "Look at—your face."

"What." Coward found a shaving mirror and gasped at countenance, arms and knees, covered with great crimson blotches.

"Look like—clown at circus," Derby remarked. "Sand fly bites."

"Oh." Coward breathed more easily.

The train jerked into motion and the carriers trotted beside it, scooping mud on the rails and shoving mightily as the cradle showed signs of slewing off the track. They pulled into Bukama just after noon, and Coward stepped gratefully off the cradle.

The river was about three hundred yards wide, black and stagnant under the blistering sun. Bare mud banks stretched for many feet below the line of foliage and here and there sand bars showed above the surface. The village was scattered over the north bank and a few concession factories showed rusted galvanized roofs against the trees. A timber wharf stretched like a centipede down the mud flat to the water. Stacey, followed by a couple of white men, walked to meet them.

"Hello, Derby," he called. "Er—sorry you've been dicky."

"Oh—er—feel fine now, thanks."

"Excellent. Well, I've been talking to these people. They say we can't get through because the river's too low."

"We'll get through," said Derby grimly. "Have you asked for labor?"

"Yes, but there's not a man to be had."

"So. Well, you and Coward get the cruisers in the water. I'll get a canoe and go up river for some men."

"Look here, hadn't you better take it easy?" Coward worried.

"It's all right. All I have to do is sit in a canoe for a day or so."

He started off that evening, and Stacey sent Kaliki to try for laborers. The ten carriers were paid off and they disappeared into the native village.

By next morning Kaliki stood outside the tents worriedly.

"No man fit work, *Ba'as,*" he reported. "All men run."

Belgians strolled to look them over during that day and sniggered as Stacey tried to get them to help.

"It's no use," he growled disgustedly. "They're all concession men."

NEXT day Derby came with six large canoes and paddlers.

"We'll need these to get the supplies down to Kabalo," he said.

Coward told him of the labor difficulty.

"Oh yes," he said. "These concessionaires are used to pressing labor. The poor devils of natives often work for months without pay. I'll send for some chiefs and explain that we'll pay for labor. That'll fetch 'em."

"We just can't move without you, can we?" Stacey said tightly.

Derby looked at him.

"No, I don't think you can."

He turned in to his tent, tapping his brow with nervous fingers.

"Headache?" asked Coward.

"No—yes—I'll take some aspirin."

That evening chiefs appeared, eyes fearfully over their shoulders as they squatted outside Derby's tent.

"Spread out some trade stuff, Coward," he suggested. "I'll explain that we'll give it to them."

After a long palaver the chiefs stole into the bush.

"We'll be unpopular with the concessionaires," grinned Derby, turning in.

Next morning Coward poked his head out to find an immense crowd of silent natives hunkered around the tents.

Under Coward's direction they jacked up the cradles, refitted wheels and ran the cruisers down a hastily built runway to the water. By afternoon the cradles were knocked down and the cruisers floating, though leaking badly.

Derby moved about, superintending the loading of stores into the canoes. But Coward saw him stumble once or twice and lean weakly against a tree.

Coward spent the rest of the day instructing Kaliki in the operation of the cruiser engines. They were fueled, oiled and water pumped out of Tweedledee. By night he was satisfied that Kaliki could manage one launch unaided.

"I'll take Tweedledee," he said. "You can sleep aboard Tweedledum, Derby. We'll take turns to watch, Coward."

At dawn the river was cold. Stacey looked out of the Tweedledee cabin.

"Morning," he called. "Everything all right?"

"Yes, thanks," Coward said, marvelling at his civility.

"I've got a pilot coming down in a few minutes," Stacey went on. "Half caste recommended by one of the Belgians."

Derby sat up in his cot.

"What's that about a pilot?"

Coward told him.

"Don't like a half caste pilot," he grumbled. "Rather have a river boy. But we'd better not criticize the only constructive thing Stacey's done."

"Aren't you being a bit hard on him?" Coward asked. "I know he was a swine coming up. But he seems all right now."

"The trip isn't over yet."

THE pilot came down over the mud. He was a tall, white-clad person with a complexion like an overripe lemon. He deposited a patent leather suitcase on the Tweedledum and stepped aboard.

"Ah! *Bon jour!* Good morning, gempmen. You see I speak several lanuage'. I am Louis-Phillipe de Marceau."

Derby choked.

"Any relation to the count?" he asked gravely.

"My uncle, sar," said the half caste, equally gravely.

He extended a long, thin hand. "I glad to meet you, gempmen. What say we 'ave dreenk, yes?"

"Better step on him," muttered Derby and closed his eyes.

"Take your shoes off whilst aboard my ship," roared Coward suddenly.

"Yessar!" gasped the mulatto and hastily removed the offending footgear.

"Now take your place in the bows. I'll call you when I want you."

Stacey came over for breakfast and chatted amiably while they drank teas afterwards.

"Tell you what," he suggested. "You take it easy going down river, Derby. Coward can con these two craft to Kabolo. I'll go ahead in a canoe and make arrangements for the overland trip."

They watched Stacey start and disappear, waving around a bend.

"You take Tweedledee, Derby," Coward said. "I'll go ahead with the pilot in Tweedledum."

They cast off, the half caste pilot at the wheel of Tweedledum. Belgians stood on the banks and waved jeeringly.

"They think we can't do it," Derby called. "I'd like to make a bet with 'em."

A bend hid the township and in an hour they were alone in a mysterious solitude. The beat of the engines echoed oddly between the impenetrable walls of trees. The river was a glassy stretch of semi-opaque green in which Coward could see slime-covered branches below the surface.

"Careful," he ordered the pilot. "One of those snags can hole us."

"Yessar. I h'understand, sar. I am very good pilot."

Coward looked at him. His eyes were rolling furtively.

Overhead the brilliant sky was dotted with small, fleecy clouds and snowy marabout storks planed from cotton woods lofting above the solid mass of forest. Monkeys shook the topmost branches and chattered.

Coward breathed easily and reached for his pipe. He inflated his chest. At last, after struggling against impossible difficulties for five weeks they were sailing freely. He blinked sleepily at the banks sliding slowly past.

Suddenly the Tweedledum lurched as the pilot spun the wheel.

"Stop! *Arretez!* Stop!" he yelled.

Coward jumped for the controls. There was a shock, a sickening drag and, as he threw the lever to reverse, the cruiser struck.

CHAPTER VI

DEATH ON THE WAY

KALIKI swiftly threw his engine into reverse, narrowly avoiding collision and, yelling madly, the paddlers backed water until the canoes were rocking all

over the river. The Tweedledum's propellers churned black mud but the cruiser remained fast aground.

"Mud bank," said the pilot squatting calmly behind the wheel. "It is more better that we retreat."

"Overside, and get us off," ordered Coward.

The pilot glanced at him.

"I cannot. It is below the dignity of a first class person to go into water before these bush people."

"So! Get over!" roared Coward and heaved him into the river.

The half caste soused beneath the surface and came up sputtering, his face green with fright. The canoemen yelled delightedly.

"Stay there and get us off or I'll drown you," threatened Coward. "Ah. Get back, you mudlark," stamping on his fingers as the dripping pilot tried to board.

Weeping, the pilot probed below the bows and brought up hands full of green slime.

"How deep is it?"

"Three feet."

"Come on, Kaliki, get the men into the water; they'll have to lift her."

Jumping overside, he directed the canoemen to each side of the hull, their shoulders to the beam. They jerked and heaved upwards, their feet sinking deep in the mud.

"Keep clear of the screw," he warned and climbed aboard to start the engines. "Now! Hough—hough—hough!"

They got off again. It was well past noon and the river was like a sheet of burnished tin, the heat reverberating from its surface until Coward's eyes ached, although he wore goggles. But he stood near the wheel watching the glassy surface closely. They were negotiating a narrow stretch. The trees nearly met above them. Rocks broke surface close to port. Glancing back he saw Tweedledee fall into line, the canoes astern. He turned to look ahead. The pilot was watching keenly, his hands fidgeting on the wheel. They were close to a large rock and suddenly he threw over the wheel.

"Damn you!" Coward smashed him on the head and grabbed the wheel, barely clearing the rock. He dared not stop for fear of collision in the narrow space, so he ran for open water. Signaling stop, he left the wheel and turned for the pilot. But the half caste was overboard, hopping across the rocks near the bank.

He raised his revolver, then with a grunt shoved it back in his belt.

Tweedledee ran alongside.

"He tried to sink us!" Coward gasped.

"God." Derby's ashen face was grave. "That means they surely suspect something."

"That's true."

They had not gone more than a mile before they were aground again.

"Here," Derby struggled to sit up. "I'll get overside this time. You stay aboard—rest."

"Stay where you are. Dammit! You're sick!"

"I'm—all right."

"Look here, Derby," said Coward earnestly. "You're in charge, now that Stacey is ahead. But you're ill; you've got to rest. I'll get us there somehow. Dammit, if you don't take it easy you'll —well—you'll die or something."

Coward glared helplessly, then bent to tuck in his mosquito net. He called to Kaliki.

"Empty sixteen gasoline drums; fill the tanks and when you've put in all they'll take throw the rest overside. These hulls are drawing too much water; the propeller shafts are outside and they're liable to be smashed off."

The drums emptied, Coward stoppered them tightly and lashed eight drums to each keel, wedging them under the bilges until each cruiser drew little more than a foot. Dragging clear of the mud they started again, the screws, half out of the water, lashing it to dirty foam. Nevertheless, they went aground four more times that day. By night Coward was covered with slime from head to foot and staggering with exhaustion. They were aground again.

HE WATCHED the canoemen build their little fires on the sand and waited to boil water for Derby to drink.

He was very weak, Coward decided. His face, woefully thin, was covered with

golden beard that somehow increased his emaciated appearance.

"More trouble?" he whispered.

"Aground," Coward told him. "We'll camp and go through tomorrow."

Derby's eyes were open and glassy. His head lolled back on the pillow, mouth open, as though the few words had exhausted him.

"Would you like anything?" Coward asked.

"No. Sleep."

"All right. I'll come back."

"Wait."

He bent close to the pale lips.

"I think—I'm going to die," said Derby distinctly.

"Don't be silly," Coward's voice quavered. "You—you'll be all right."

"Listen. You've—got to get through."

"Of course, we'll get through."

Coward poured a few drops into his mouth, then bathed his head with the spirit. The thin cheeks flushed a little.

"We'll be in Kabolo in a day or so, and get you a doctor. Stacey's gone for one."

"I'll be dead—by then."

"Piffle." Coward tried to make his voice warm and jovial.

There was a long silence. Icy with dread he watched Derby, who lay still as death, eyes closed, breath fluttering his nostrils. Then the blue eyes opened and stared earnestly.

"Got to get through," he whispered. "Don't—get rattled."

"Sure."

"You'll—do it. Done most—work anyhow."

"Please!" Coward blinked pricking eyes.

"Good egg," mumbled Derby. "Get through. Save poor devils. My pals—y'know. Wish I could do it."

"You'll do it," whispered Coward through dry lips. "You'll be fine. You've got to. Your—pals will be waiting for you." He stopped at a pale, knowing smile.

"Brandy."

Coward poured a little in his mouth. He licked his lips feebly.

"Listen." His wan features puckered suddenly and helpless tears gathered in deep hollows below his eyes. "Can't—remember course."

Coward's face turned ghastly. Derby's eyes watched him, large and lustrous in the lantern light.

"There, there!" mumbled the younger man, patting his almost transparent hand. "We'll be off in the morning."

Derby smiled and Coward felt his fingers holding his own with feeble tenacity. He crouched, aching with cramp, beside the cot. Derby's eyes were closed now, his breath short and whistling in his throat.

Suddenly the fingers gripped Coward's with terrible strength. There was a harsh, prolonged rattle, horrible in the silence.

Derby was dead.

WHEN dawn came the natives were crouching like crows in their dugouts, frightened eyes watching Coward's every move.

He went to the cabin and wrapped Derby in a sheet. His servant, shivering and whimpering, packed his kit which he stacked in a corner of the cabin. They paddled to the bank and Kaliki and Basutos tenderly lifted the body ashore.

Coward would always remember the picture of the shallow hole scraped in soft loam; of Kaliki, tears rolling down his blue-black, tattooed face; the canoemen watching, open mouthed. He looked down at the rigid shape lying at the bottom of the grave, water, seeping through the red earth, staining the sheet like blood.

He tried to remember a simple burial service.

Mumbling a prayer, he dropped a few handsful of earth into the hole. Kaliki completed the burial, carefully tamping down the swampy earth.

When it was over they returned to the cruiser, Coward looking back at a cross made of trimmed branches that stood like a sentinel beneath the tree.

"All right," he said. "Get under way."

DAYS, he lost all count of days of groundings and heaving, followed by a week of incessant rain, and they came to a wide reach. The pilot jerked his whistle lanyard and birds exploded from

the trees. They rounded a bend and sighted a low, whitewashed church steeple amid the green.

White buildings with rusted, galvanized roofs came in sight, then a spindly jetty with a derrick and a few rusty lighters. Tooting shrilly, they drew alongside the wharf which was thronged with astonished natives and shouting whites.

Coward looked through the crowd and saw Stacey shouldering his way through.

"I buried Derby on the river bank," he said quietly.

"Good Lord!"

"Look here, Stacey, I'm tired," he said. "Put guards on that sternwheeler before they see the ammunition."

He turned to meet the Belgian and several tattered native police.

"So! What you do here?"

"Oh, shut up!" groaned Coward.

He yelled and the police grabbed for Coward.

"Hey, Stacey," he called.

Stacey followed him as he was hustled through a gabbling mob to a mud walled police station. A tired faced Belgian official listened to the fat, cross-eyed man's complaint.

"Well, *monsieur,* what have you to say?" he snapped. "We are informed that you come here to run a river service between Bukama and Kabolo. You know you cannot do this without permission from the Kabolo concession. All this territory is leased from the government by the concession. Your property will be held until we receive instructions from Elizabethville."

"But—"

"*Assez!*"

They walked out into the muddy road.

"Fine mess," observed Stacey. "It'll take months for them to communicate with Elizabethville."

"Trespass!" growled Coward wearily. "Those Belgians are more afraid of our muscling in on their river—if we tell them we don't want to do that, they might let us go."

"They won't; I know these damned officials."

"I'm going to try it, anyhow."

He returned to the police office where the fat man and the official were chuckling together.

"There is some mistake, gentlemen," he said.

"*Oui,* and you 'ave made it," chortled the official.

They went into laughter in which Coward joined half-heartedly.

"Oh, very good," he smiled painfully. "We made a mistake. But we did not know that the river was your property."

"*B'en sur.* Me, I am *agent de brousse* for the concession," stated the squint-eyed man importantly.

"*Enchanté, monsieur!*" bowed Coward. "Had we known that we would not have intruded. But it is not too late. I'm sure we can come to an arrangement." He watched their faces harden. "Gentlemen, we will not stay in the river. We will change our plans; it is not too late. I can pay you for the use of your steamer and the lighters and we will ship our cruisers by rail to the lake."

"*Mais,* what lake?" demanded the official.

"Tanganyika, it's only 150 miles away."

"*Mais—*"

The fat man stopped him.

"How do you propose to get there?" he inquired.

"Is the railroad yours too?"

"*Oui.*"

"Then perhaps you will allow us to send our craft and supplies by the first train."

The Belgians exchanged glances.

"You have money?"

"Scrip on the bank of Rhodesia and the Banque du Congo."

"*Bon.*"

The Belgian presented a staggering bill, and Stacey signed a cheque for the amount.

"I arrange everyt'eeng," smiled the fat man. "Tomorrow, I geeve you laborers, we load the train. You start day after."

THE NEXT day blacks ran over the lighters dodging the raw hide whips of their leaders. Puffing importantly, the Belgian screamed orders and after a full day's work the cruisers were chocked in their cradles on flat cars and the supplies locked in two covered cars. A

box car was coupled in the rear of the train for the two whites.

"I'll stay up and keep an eye open," said Coward.

"What d'you mean?" Stacey, yawning, was unlacing his boots.

"Doesn't it strike you that we've had too little difficulty with these Belgians? That pilot at Bukama tried to sink us. But they let us out of here quite easily. There might be something waiting ahead. D'you think anyone spotted the ammunition?"

"No. It was marked machinery and there weren't any whites about anyhow. Stay up if you like; I'm turning in."

Before dawn lanterns bobbed about the muddy track and the engine whistled shrilly. The Belgian ran here and there yelling orders and Kaliki marched the length of the train looking for stowaways.

"We ought to get there by night," Coward said. "What time are we due at the lake?" he called to the Belgian.

"*Comment?* Oh—" his fat sides began to shake. "When the train get there."

"Funny little man, aren't you?" commented Coward and crawled into his cot.

The massive half caste engineer whistled again and they were off. Coward dropped off to sleep, listening to the rattle of wheels and a crooning song from Kaliki, up ahead somewhere.

He awakened just before noon, ate some food and after washing felt quite fit. He looked out at the shadowy forest through which they were passing. To the left a broad river showed from time to time through the bush.

"We're getting through," he exulted.

Pity that Derby couldn't be there. The bitter struggle over burning sand; the mountain, grass fires, thirst, the heart-breaking voyage down river and that awful night in the lake. Derby who had worked through them all would miss the triumphant finish. But he'd be glad anyway. Coward remembered his cheerfulness, his insistence to carry on through every obstacle, his struggle against the sickness that had killed him. It was too bad.

It was dusk when Coward lay down for a rest. Dozing, a bone-shaking jerking and tremendous clatter aroused him. He looked out. It was dark. The train had stopped in a clearing. A few natives ganged about the engine and a watchfire flickered on sheds, stacks of ties and machinery.

Kaliki's face appeared in the doorway. "Road done finish, *Ba'as.*"

Coward jumped down into the mud and ran forward. The engine had stopped some yards from a dead end.

Game was plentiful.

Beyond it he could see nothing. It was the end of the road.

"Where's the lake?" he shouted.

"Thirteen miles," Kaliki yelled back.

No wonder those Belgians had been so amused.

CHAPTER VII

FOR THE MAN WHO DIED . . .

STACEY splashed through the mud to him.

"What is it?"

"Some ghastly mistake has been made," he babbled. "There's no more track. We're finished."

"This is your damned fault," snapped Stacey bitterly. "You and that swine Derby. He knew this track wasn't completed. By God! You're under arrest!"

"Shut your damned mouth, or I'll shut it for you. For God's sake, keep calm. Don't let these blacks see we're licked."

"Who the hell cares? You wait, you swine. I'll see that—"

Suddenly Coward lashed out. His fist caught Stacey on the chin and he splashed into the mud.

Struggling to his feet, he tugged out his revolver.

"You struck me—your superior officer," he raged.

The revolver rose until its muzzle threatened his forehead.

"I could shoot you for that," said Stacey thinly.

Coward eyed the weapon.

"If that's the way you feel, go ahead," he said.

Cursing, Stacey reholstered the pistol and stumbled, muttering down the track. Coward called Kaliki.

"Road finish," said that useful man, "because black men ran away. Concession never pay them. How we go do now?"

"Wait for morning."

"*Ya Ba'as.*"

The engineer strolled towards them.

"Off load in mornin' time," he said. "Then I go back, Kabolo."

Coward watched him go to a hut where a fat native woman waited, giggling.

"Look here, Kaliki," he whispered. "We've got to keep that engine here. Otherwise we'll be stranded. Listen, take your three brothers and steal crowbars from that shed; there must be some there. Go back along the track, softly, softly, past the siding switch, and take out at least two rails. Don't let anyone see you."

"*Ya, Ba'as.*"

Coward returned to the car, where Stacey crouched over a table, his bruised face evil in lantern light.

"I'm preparing a report," he said, "indicating gross negligence on Derby's part in not advising of this situation. I'm reporting you for neglect of duty on several occasions, obstruction and mutiny. I imagine you'll have some difficulty in getting out of that."

"You're going to a lot of trouble to protect yourself," sneered Coward. "Now I'll tell you something. I'm going to get these damned cruisers through to the lake."

"It's thirteen miles, you fool," shouted Stacey. "It might as well be thirteen thousand. How do you think you are going to do it?"

"Look here." Coward leaned close to the angry face. "You called me a coward, and maybe I've been one. I went through hell in that forest and river. I did it to get those cruisers through. Derby killed himself trying to do the same thing. Now, I'm going to finish the job, for his sake as well as everything else. All it means to you is a few medals. It meant more to him, and more to me. I'm going through whether you forbid it or not; with you or without you. Mutiny? Yes, that's mutiny. And what are you going to do about it? For two pins I'd break your fat neck!" His eyes blazed with fury and Stacey moved back in his chair.

"I believe you're crazy," he whispered hoarsely.

"That suits me. Now, don't talk to me any more," said Coward and climbed down out of the car.

He walked forward past the dead end and his lantern flooded the rain pitted red earth. The trees had been cleared for the rails, but the formation had been neglected for months and was broken down and swampy with water. Would it be possible to drag the cruisers over that? No, the wheels would bog to their axles; and there was no motive power. He looked back; the watchfire was a red spark in the distance. Great trees bent above him; he was walking in a dense, black tunnel. Suddenly he heard sounds that he had not previously noticed and the smell of an animal came to him; a hot reek that told of a wild beast close by.

He walked on and it seemed that something kept pace with him, walking parallel in the forest. He stopped, and the thing stopped. His hair crisped at a soft grunt.

SUDDENLY wild with rage he charged at the sound, shouting, cursing. There was a startled bark and whatever it was crashed away through the dripping jungle. He returned to the track, muttering. Suddenly he straightened up. Why, he was not afraid! That thing which a few months ago would have sent him shivering with panic back to the fire, had only succeeded in making him angry.

He threw back his head, laughing wildly; stood, arms akimbo in the soaking darkness.

"You can't lick me now," he told the crowding bush.

At dawn he got up to find the train enveloped in mist through which sheeted natives moved like ghosts. Stacey appeared, stamping through the mud.

"Here are your orders," he said immediately. "The cars will remain here on that siding, and the driver will return to Kabolo with those four empty flats. You will remain with Kaliki and your servant to guard the cruisers, ammunition and supplies until I give you other orders."

"Where are you going?" stammered Coward.

"Through to the lake!" Stacey replied dramatically. "I've got a guide who can take me to a lakeside village. From there I'll get a canoe across to Kigoma, where I'll deliver my report and await further orders."

"But—"

"You've had your orders," snapped Stacey. "I'm taking these two Basutos and my servant."

An hour later Coward watched Stacey march down the formation, followed by three shivering blacks carrying his camp kit. Ahead of him walked the Basutos and behind, his servant. Kaliki stood nearby.

"Did you take out those rails?"

"*Ya Ba'as.* We hide them in bush."

The engineer swaggered to him.

"We go back now," he proclaimed. "Other white man say leave you train on siding."

Coward walked ahead, followed by Kaliki. A ribbon of naked earth stretched through the trees, deep footprints in it where Stacey had walked.

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"Too soft," said Kaliki. "How we do, *Ba'as?*"

"Don't know," he replied. "Unless we build another railroad."

"*Ya Ba'as,*" said the Basuto calmly. "When we start?"

Coward started. Did he really think they could build a track to the lake? He pondered. After all, all they needed was man-power, rails and ties. He looked over the stacks of material, calculating. No, there couldn't be more than a mile of track there. Suddenly an idea came. He called the engineer.

"What men built this railway?"

"Black people from bush," answered the half caste. "But they no 'gree for work; they run. By'm bye soldiers come," he added spitefully. "Then they go work."

"Where are their villages?"

"Plenty close by."

"So!" Coward rubbed his hands. "You wait for me."

"Nossah! I go back."

"Listen." Coward tapped his chest. "You can't go back; the rails are taken out behind you. Kaliki, put your Basuto friend to guard this man. If he tries to move his engine, kill him!"

Nod, the remaining Basuto, flexed mighty muscles and hefted a steel bar he had found.

"If he move I smash he brain," he said with relish.

"My master go put you for prison," quavered the mulatto.

"Get a guide who knows the villages and an interpreter." Coward told Kaliki. "We'll go and look-see."

Hurrying to the supplies car he opened cases and stuffed a haversack with tobacco, trade knives and a few gay handkerchiefs.

Kaliki joined him and indicated a cut faced native with filed teeth.

"This man savvy talk for this part."

THE guide led them a mile down track and turned off through a narrow path to a large village about three miles from the railway. Natives retreated into the bush as they approached and a tall man with ravaged face, fearful eyes and clothed in the remains of a pair of cotton trousers shuffled unhappily towards them.

"This man the chief?"

"*Ya Ba'as.*"

"Tell him I want men to lay track."

The chief beat his hands together whimpering, and gestured vaguely towards the bush.

"He say, all men gone."

Coward offered tobacco and a knife. The chief reached timidly for them but held them at arms length, blinking doubtfully.

"Tell him I will pay one franc every day to each man for railway work. And for each man I will give half a franc to the chief to provide food."

The attitude of the chief was pathetic. He listened carefully, eyes rolling; asked for repetition, nodding his old, shaven head. Then he looked awesomely at the white man.

"He say you go pay? For true?"

"Yes."

"No soldiers go flog man, take women?"

"No," snapped Coward. "Is that the way these trade concessions work?"

"*Ya Ba'as,*" replied Kalik. "They press men for work and no pay he."

The chief yelled loudly and men skulked out of the bush. They listened and came running, grinning eagerly. Then a drum began to throb at the end of the group of huts.

"They call all men from other villages," Kaliki explained. "You go catch plenty men."

"Kaliki," Coward called. "You take all the men to the clearing. Take crowbars and hammers, anything, and run back thirteen miles. Then you start pulling up track. Don't injure the rails or ties. I'll send back the engine and flat cars. Then the chief and half the men must lay them ahead of the clearing. We'll go back and forth until the rails reach the lake. Then we'll take the cruisers."

He returned to the clearing, followed by the chief and interpreter. The engineer stamped up to him yelling dismally.

"I no fit go back."

"You no fit," said Coward recklessly. "I'm your master now. You run those cars on the siding and take out those

four flats. Then back up thirteen miles and bring back track."

Under Nod's fierce eye the cowed driver climbed into his cab and obeyed orders. Coward watched natives swarm out of the bush and climb aboard the flats for the ride down line. A gang knocked out the dead-end and manhandled rails and ties from the stacks to commence track-laying in the soft earth ahead. They knew their business, he congratulated himself, as he watched some dropping brush on the formation while others shouldered the forty pound rails and followed gangs dropping ties at regular intervals. By dark the engine had made three trips and the line was advanced nearly half a mile.

"Light fires. Work all night," commanded Coward. "Send women to bring and cook food. I will pay double."

"I tire," moaned the engineer.

So Kaliki relieved him and Coward walked forward to watch the blacks slaving like demons clearing the surface, dropping ties and wedging the rails in them as they had been taught by the concessionaires.

There was no time to ballast the formation and the engine swayed and listed as it crept over the soft ground. Gangs cut wood in the forest and two men sat on the bogie, thrusting logs into the firebox until a constant stream of sparks blazed from the bulbous funnel. During the night it rained, heavy, constant rain. He cursed the weather bitterly, storming at the delay. There was danger that the engineer had sent warning to Kabolo. They'd jail him for certain if they caught him, he reflected wryly. But it would take at least a week for a runner to get to Kabolo, and another week to return. He dared not think of how they'd get the engine back to its headquarters; he didn't care. He hounded over a thousand natives, recklessly giving them trade goods to keep up their spirits.

AFTER the second day he lost all track of time. Sometimes there would be a dead tree across the way. He raved at it as though it were a living, sensate thing that defied him. Once, dragging at a tangle of vines that dared to cross his path, a slim, yellow cobra struck at him. Savagely he stamped on the evil, arrow shaped head until the graceful, golden coils stopped whipping about his ankles; then carried on, tearing the tough lianas off the formation.

He had no idea of the distance they had come, how far was the lake. One night there was cold wind whipping the forest, brilliant lightning. He cursed bitterly as he listened to crashing trees and watched rain lash the red ground to blood colored foam. Next morning he splashed through glutinous mud, followed by hollow cheeked natives who thrust branches beneath ties and scooped shallow trenches to permit water to drain off the formation. A cutting had fallen in. Fifty men cleared it with small native hoes, pans and their bare hands until the rails were uncovered.

The engineer, silent now, stuck resignedly to his levers, shunting back and forth, convinced that the white man was a demon, and terrified of him.

Mud from head to foot, unshaven, filthy and shaking with fever, Coward drove on, eyes glittering from deep hollows; sleeping in his tattered clothes, dragging aching limbs from his camp bed each dawn to swallow a cup of tea and a biscuit as he hounded the natives.

Then one morning they saw daylight ahead. The trees met over the formation like a tunnel, but at the end of it was blue sky and water.

He redoubled his efforts; shouting, screaming at the men, until trembling and silent, they dropped the rails in place, drove wedges and fell over each other in their panic to get more.

They reached the shore of Lake Tanganyika.

It stretched as far as Coward could see, empty in every direction. It was about forty miles wide at this point, Coward knew, and somewhere to the northeast was Kigoma.

"Back to the railhead camp," he ordered. "We'll bring down the cruisers."

He was startled to see three natives step out of the bush. Kaliki shouted something, and he recognized the two Basutos who had gone ahead with Stacey. They crept forward, kneeling at his feet. They were hollow cheeked and their eyes were heavy with fatigue.

"Where did you come from?" he asked.

"They say they run from white man," interpreted Kaliki.

"What?"

They talked for minutes.

"They say white man took short cut six days ago; he crossed river to go north east. Pretty soon, they lost. White man too angry. He say, make they run quick, find path. Bush men who carried loads ran away because he flog them. Then he servant take go. This, my brothers say they stay with white man. But he too angry. He talk like crazy and say he kill them if they no find lake. For three days they lost. Then white man shoot at my brother, but he miss. So they run, leave him. He lost in bush."

COWARD stared before him. Stacey lost! That meant there would be no report of mutiny, no reference to cowardice; nothing to prevent Derby for getting credit for his sacrifice. He, Coward, was in command now.

"How long since you ran away?" he asked.

"Two days, *Ba'as.*"

Two days without food. He must be dead.

"Come on," he ordered.

He walked on over the ties, watching keenly for bad spots; ordering briefly here and there, testing the ground. But his thoughts returned to Stacey. Maybe he should try to find him. But he couldn't; it was more important to get the cruisers across the lake. That's it! He would deliver the craft, then return and search for Stacey. He tramped on. But he might be too late. If he went now he might find the thick shouldered man still alive. There was no sun beneath the thick canopy of forest, no means of following a course. Still, he might, somehow, have reached the lake shore. Perhaps he had already found a canoe and was on his way to Kigoma. Coward would carry on and if Stacey hadn't turned up he'd return and find him. Oh damn, he groaned, he was going round in circles. Perhaps that's what Stacey was doing; wandering in the awful circle that could only end in death.

He stopped and called back to Kaliki.

"Can you bring the train and the cruisers to the lake?"

Kaliki drew himself to his full height.

"*Ya, Ba'as,*" he said proudly.

"I trust you to do that," he said gravely. "I'll take these two Basutos and two men who know this bush; find them for me. You go back and bring the train carefully to the lake."

"*Ya, Ba'as.*"

"Where did the white man turn off the track?" he asked.

They walked to a spot eleven miles from the lake.

"He turn here, *Ba'as.* Rail go south, so he say short cut go north-east."

"All right. Kaliki, go ahead and take command. Don't let any man disobey. I'll find the white man; you get through to the lake by tomorrow."

"*Ya, Ba'as.*"

"When you get there, cover the train with branches so no man may see, and wait me. If any strangers come, hold them."

Slinging his rifle, Coward started into the forest followed by the Basutos and two bushmen. There were few traces but for torn branches and a few half obliterated footmarks in the soft clay.

They crossed the river and darkness overtook them after a couple of hours. The bushmen chopped a branch bed for Coward and lit a fire at the base of a tree.

He tried to go on, but exhaustion overcame him and he slept.

The brain fever bird was uttering his bell-like descending scale and a slight grayness outlined the treetops.

"Come on."

"No, *Ba'as.* This be false dawn. He go dark again soon."

"Can you see the trail?"

"*Ya, Ba'as.*"

"Go on."

They marched, the bushmen going ahead to chop back overhanging vines. After noon Coward halted.

"Look here," he said to Winken. "You take this bushman and go north east from here. I'll take your brother and go east. Here's my revolver. If you find the white man fire three times. Savvy? If you hear me fire, you come."

"*Ya, Ba'as.*"

THE two natives disappeared and Coward, glancing at his field compass started east, the bushman clearing the path before him. The rest of the day they moved ahead, sometimes following a half defined trail, sometimes taking cover as a jungle beast crashed through the thick bush. Several times he shouted and waited breathless for a reply. The cruisers must be at the lake by now, he thought. Why the hell couldn't Stacey have stayed with them? He pushed on and suddenly it was dark again.

"Make torches," he ordered. "We go on."

The natives were weary and so was he, but they continued, shouting, listening, but the whirr of insects drowned out everything. Birds, disturbed by the smoking torches fled before them, their wings startlingly loud.

They went on, shouting, searching for the trail.

Hopelessly Coward tried to peer through the streaming blackness. It was impossible to see anything. He managed to light a torch and glanced at his feet. There were booted tracks in the mud. Had they passed this way before? Suddenly his mouth dried and he gripped the bushman's arm.

"Does he know the way back?"

"*Ya, Ba'as.*"

"Have we passed this way before?"

"No, *Ba'as.*" The Basuto's calm, deep tones calmed him. "He say lake three hours from here."

Then those tracks must be Stacey's.

He shouted above the storm, but his voice could not carry.

"Light another torch and follow these tracks."

The wind dropped and rain hissed steadily on the forest roof. They followed the faint scars on the leafy mud. Then, wiped out by rain, they ceased.

"Aho-o-y! Stacey!" called Coward. "Shout!" he ordered.

The Basuto roared deeply and the bushman shouted fearfully, his eyes on Coward. They stopped. There was a wailing sound.

They went on, shouting, searching for the trail. Coward fired one shot in the air. They listened again.

"Bushman say he hear somet'ing," said the Basuto.

They heard a movement far off, then a cry.

"Be man!" cried the Basuto.

"Stacey!" yelled Coward. "Ahoy!" He made towards the sounds. "Stop. Listen."

Again a screaming sound and crashing in the bush.

"Come on, there he is. Get more torches." Coward plunged away towards the sounds, the Basuto after him. Thorns tore his shirt half off him. Wet branches thrashed his face but he ducked his head stumbling over lianas, fighting through thorn bushes. He stopped, shouting again. He heard a definite scrabbling in the bush and a whimpering scream. Then suddenly through a curtain of dense thicket burst Stacey, bleeding, soaking wet, mouth wide open and screaming.

"Oh, Coward. Thank God!" he gasped. "Oh God! Oh God! I thought you'd never come. Oh God! I was lost. I thought you'd leave me alone in there. Where are we? Oh God!" He sprawled at Coward's feet, weeping, babbling, his hands clutching Coward's muddy boots, whimpering with hysteria. "Oh God! Take me away from this—anywhere. I'm afraid!"

Coward stared aghast.

"Here, buck up," he soothed. "It's all right. Take a drop of this."

He held a water bottle filled with whiskey. Stacey gulped it, turning piteous eyes to Coward.

"Take me away!" he moaned. He clung to Coward patting and clutching like a frightened child.

"Hold on," snapped Coward, suddenly disgusted. "You're all right now."

He fired his rifle three times and listened for the three answering reports.

"Come on, we'll get you to camp."

ON the second day they struggled down the muddy track. Spread rails and ties sunk deep in the earth told Coward that the train was somewhere ahead. After some hours they heard a mighty yell and Kaliki raced to meet them.

"*Ba'as* done come!" he exulted, patting at Coward's shoulders. "*Ba'as* come! All here, *Ba'as*. All train, all people."

"Good man!"

Natives thronged the track, pattering through the mud to greet them, babbling and grinning widely.

"Buck up!" he muttered to Stacey, who had stopped and was glaring wildly at them. "We're there."

He led him through the jabbering crowd to his tent; fed him some soup and got him into bed. He sat by the cot, Stacey clinging tightly to his hand until he slept.

The lake bank was only a few feet high with a natural slope and Coward directed the laborers to build a ramp and slipway from the cars to the water. Under Kaliki's watchful eye the other Basutos toiled, fitting wheels to the cradles. Coward looked in at Stacey. He was sitting on his cot, head in his hands. He looked up.

"How d'you feel?"

He shook his head silently.

"Better take some quinine and get some food," Coward advised. "We start across the lake in a few hours. With luck we can reach Kigoma by night."

Stacey coughed. His eyes, no longer hard, were pale and shifty. His thin mouth trembled and through his black hair the skull showed.

"Wait a minute—please. Sit down. There's something I've got to say."

Coward felt something boil within him. The shamed, weak-voiced figure hunched on his cot was very different from the bull-necked, arrogant commander who had jeered at him, called him coward, had bullied his useless way throughout the whole sickening journey.

"I shall enjoy watching you receive your precious medal," he said softly. "I shall enjoy so much seeing your face when you are praised for the work that Derby did."

Stacey looked up and his eyes pleaded mutely.

"I've been a pretty complete swine," he stammered.

Coward was silent.

"I think, if you hadn't rescued me, I'd have gone mad." His mouth twisted in a painful smile. "I don't know why you did, by the way."

"Here. It's all right," Coward had an awful dread that Stacey would collapse and weep.

"It's not. Look here, I've got to get this off my chest, if you don't mind. I, who wanted to control everything, did nothing. I wish I could do something to make it up to you and—and to Derby."

"If it hadn't been for Derby we never would have got through. Not a bloody one of us."

"I know. I've got to make it up, somehow." Stacey spread his hands. "All I can do is make a new report. I shall describe Derby's work, and yours. I—I shall recommend that you command the Tanganyika Patrol."

Stacey stood up.

"I never want to go through another experience like that," he said with complete earnestness. "If I stayed here I'd always fear it. No, I'm applying for transfer to Capetown. You've licked this jungle, this whole, damned country. You are the man to stay. Would you care to—shake hands?"

COWARD gripped his hand and they went out. Gangs of men were snubbing the Tweedledum down to the water and in a few minutes she floated clear. Two hours saw both craft fuelled and ready for sea. The tribesmen, under their chief, stood in a dense mob on the bank.

"What orders, sir?" asked Coward.

Stacey flushed deeply.

"It's your picnic," he answered.

"Tell them to wait until I come back," said Coward. "They must guard everything until I return to pay them for their work."

The chief jabbered his comprehension and Coward led the way to the supply car. With lavish hands he emptied the remaining cases of trade goods and divided tobacco, beads, printed cotton, bits of mirror, knives and salt until nothing remained.

"Tell them for God's sake to be quiet, and no lights at night."

"*Ya, Ba'as.*"

Stacey stood on the bank.

"Will you take Tweedledum, with Kaliki?" he asked. "I'll run Tweedledee, with Winken; he's the boy I tried to shoot back there. I've got to square things with him too. We'll leave Blinken and Nod in charge of supplies here."

"Right."

"Cast off. You take the lead I'll be following you."

They ran for two hours due east, then turned north. Darkness overtook them and Coward lashed a lantern to the sternmast as a marker. All that night they ran at slow speed through a choppy sea, and when dawn came Tweedledee was a few hundred yards astern and the land a brown blur to starboard.

As the sun rose Kaliki pointed. White buildings were visible against the forest.

Coward signaled a change of course and ran closer. Stacey put on speed, veering alongside. They studied the town through glasses.

"Kigoma, I think," said Stacey. "Look at that!"

Coward made out a large hull in stocks on the shore.

"Hooray!" he yelled. "We've done it. They'll never dare put that keel in the water."

"*You've* done it!" corrected Stacey. "She'll make a right good flagship for you."

"Rats!" Coward slowed to let Stacey's cruiser lead him into the harbor.

"After you, sir!" he saluted.

DRUM PATROLS

An off-the-trail novelette

By JOEL TOWNSLEY ROGERS

THE orders came through for us to make drum patrols in all their towns and villages. That was after the surrender had been signed, of course, after we had moved in to occupy them. I was in the 10th Regiment of Pacification under Colonel von Pripitz, that had the charge of a whole *gau,* and I was chosen to head one of the patrols that went through our district.

It had taken us a time to get in to them. Their big-gunned ships had still held the sea to the last, in spite of everything we could use against them, and we couldn't get our troop transports and the lighters loaded with our mechanized cavalry across salt water to them.

They thought that they owned the sea, and they fought to hold it. They fought crazily, and they fought like hell. We tried the crossing three times within a month, protected by a living roof of fighters and dive-bombers in the sky above us as we moved out, and the water around boiling with our torpedo-sleds and subs and mine sweepers. There was plenty of grief we gave them, sea

and air, slugging with everything we had; and their great ships bellowing and wallowing like wounded elephants was a sight to see, smashed by fire and hell and the screaming dive-bombers above and the streaking torpedoes around them, but still shaking their ears and staggering up from their knees, however much they were hit, and still slamming with their terrible rifles.

The roar on the sea and the smoke and the fire and the dead men floating lasted whole days and nights, but those tons of metal were too much for us, and we never made it.

We tried parachute troops then, dropping as many as forty thousand in one night, but the surprise was out of that trick by then, and they were ready for us. They were all armed—even their women and boys were armed, by millions—and they were all swarming everywhere and watching for us, and they were all tigers.

We spewed out our men like hail from as low as two hundred feet, only a second for them to reach the ground, and some of them hitting it before their umbrellas had had time to open; we spewed them out on the moors and in the woods and in the hearts of their cities; but wherever we tried it, and however quick and thick, they were there.

They wiped out our men before their feet touched ground. Not a squad got a foothold. Or if they did, and had time to get their defense circle of flame-throwers set up by half a minute, they would find the mob swarming all around them, rushing with naked breasts through the living fire to get them and overwhelming them by sheer numbers, and though thousands of them died, our men were all torn to pieces in the end.

They were fighting for their lives, and they knew it. They were all tigers. So we had to give that up, too, and buckle down to blasting them out. It had to be all in the air. But we had the planes to gang theirs wherever we found them, and we could give them three for one and still wipe them out faster than they could be replaced, and there could be only one end for that. By middle summer their air fleets had all been smashed and burned, to the last ship, on the ground or in the sky, and there was not a drome standing or a field from which a sparrow could hop off, and their plane factories had long been blasted off the map.

With the sky all ours, we had really got to work on them then. In four more weeks their cities had been blasted to dead heaps of mortar dust and rubble, their roadways and communication systems obliterated, their food depots set on fire, their power plants and water reservoirs blown off the face of the earth, and the whole intricate mechanism of their civilization, by which they were able to exist at all, smashed like the fine works of a watch beneath a hammer, by the twelve thousand dive-bombers loaded with demolitions and fragmentations which we had sent over them in endless furious waves without ceasing, day and night.

Three million tons of bombs we gave them. The earth was one continual flaming spouting roar beneath our wings. The fire of the last judgment will never be like that, for it will last only a day, and ours lasted four weeks. You could see the smoke and fire for a hundred miles, and hear the everlasting roar nearly that far.

We blew off the whole map. Yet even so they waited till more than two-thirds of their whole population was dead, and the rest of them crazed and waterless and starving, before they spread the white flags and surrendered. So by the time we got in there with our army of pacification there was not a great deal left for us to do.

ACCORDING to the terms of the surrender their sea-fleet had been towed out to mid-Atlantic and sunk by torpedoes in bombing practice, trying out some new super-demolitions we had developed. We might have used those ships ourselves, but we were too damned mad. Their land guns of all sorts and calibers—coastal defense, field-guns, howitzers, anti-tank and A.A.'s, whatever had escaped our blasting—had already been unbreeched by them and assembled in depots to be turned over to us, before

we had accepted the surrender in tot and ceased our punishment altogether. After our occupation we had completed the destruction of what remnants of fortifications and bomb-shelters still remained, and had made a collection of all small arms and private weapons, dividing the country up into *gaus,* districts, and sub-areas for that purpose and performing the work with methodical thoroughness, each mop-up squad covering its particular area house by house, and room by room, and cellar brick by cellar brick, and prodding every foot of the ground around where they might have buried them.

It took a million men six months, but we did the job completely. It is fair to say that few of them made any attempt to hide their weapons from us after the first few days, for if arms were found in a house we shot the inhabitants and fired it, and after we had done that a few times what guns they had were mostly found lying out in the fields and woods or dumped into the rivers. There was not a sportsman's rifle left them, not a shotgun in the whole country, not a target pistol or a boy's air rifle. There was not a farmer's pitchfork, scythe or axe. There was not a knife in any kitchen with a blade longer than three inches. They were completely weaponless when we were through.

"Not a weapon left them except their fingernails, Colonel," I overheard our fat company captain reporting to the colonel with a laugh. "And if orders come through for it, we'll use pliers and pull them."

"You had better get your pliers ready," the colonel said. "Orders may come through to do just that."

"You don't mean it seriously, sir?" said the captain, swallowing his laugh. "Of course I was just joking."

"This is not a joke, Captain," said the colonel coldly. "These people must be pacified. To any extent necessary, as decided on and ordered by the high command."

I couldn't see the captain's perturbed face. I wasn't in the room, the colonel's office, where they were talking. But I could imagine the look on it, staring in questioning alarm at our stiff-backed, cold-eyed colonel. He was a nice man, our captain. His name was Captain Weich. But he was too soft, for this work or any other. Soft and fat-hearted as a pillow.

"I understand that," I heard him say. "But, my God, Colonel, nobody would order anything like that. Why, that would be sheer bestial craziness, the order of a madman—"

"Hail the leader! Watch out what you are saying!" the colonel said. "You will do whatever you are ordered, Captain. If fingernails are to be pulled, you'll pull them. You are a madman yourself, to use that word to me. Do you want to be reported to the black—?"

And his cold voice ended. That was all which was audible of that.

Well, orders didn't come through to pull their fingernails, but they came through for drum patrol. We had tried it out here and there in Poland, and had found it had a good effect so far as it had gone, but this was to be done thoroughly, and over the whole country.

I was ordered to report to the colonel for assignment to special detail one morning, and I clicked my heels together and played dumb about it as I saluted my platoon lieutenant, who had given me the order, though I knew already what the special detail was, having seen the bare pipe-iron frameworks on wheels that had arrived by truck and been stored in one of the commissary sheds, and having noted also the additional drummers who had been ordered to the regiment.

"Hail the leader, Lord Lieutenant!" I told my lieutenant, putting a whine into my voice. "But it doesn't seem to me that it's quite fair. I'm due for leave, as the lieutenant may recall, and it has been promised me next week. Why should I be selected for special detail now, and maybe lose out on it?"

He looked at me a little curiously, with his head tilted on one side and an eye half closed.

"How do I know why you have been selected, Corporal?" he said. "However, I do know that I do not have to listen to any of your complaints, and I have no intention of being caught doing so.

Perhaps you are aware that a man can be put away where he'll not be due for leave for many years for any appearance of grousing or unwillingness to obey orders. And if the unwillingness is serious enough, he will be shot. Needless to say, I am going to report you. Hail the leader."

"Hail the leader!" I said to him with stupid anxiety, standing stiffly at attention. "If the lord lieutenant will pardon me this one time, it was a slip. I did not mean to seem complaining."

"A good soldier does not slip, Corporal," the lieutenant said, still with his head cocked and that one eye half closed. "And I am a good soldier. I pardon nothing. You go on report. You would if you were my own brother Now wipe that dumb look off your face and go see the colonel at once, and learn from him what your detail is with eagerness and without grousing. Hail the leader."

There was no use whining to him and expecting any sympathy. He had been a tank man, and they are all too smart and tough. You might think I had a hoodoo sign tattooed on me, the way he always treated me. He had never liked me, for no reason I could figure out. I looked back at him from the edges of my eyes as I heeled and marched away. He had begun to nod his cocked head faintly, still smiling his little smile.

I reported to the captain-adjutant in the colonel's outer office, where he sat gaunt and hollow-faced behind his desk.

"Hail the leader!" I said, clicking my heels together. "Corporal of Mopping-up Squad 3, Platoon B, Company A, at your command, Lord Captain-Adjutant. I have been ordered to report to the lord colonel for special detail. Does the lord captain-adjutant know what it might be?"

THREE typists had been clicking away at their machines when I opened the door, and an old orderly clerk bent over a file-drawer putting papers away, and a sentry armed with a sub-machine gun in front of the colonel's inner door was pacing three steps forward and three steps back. But as I came in and stood there reporting to the captain-adjutant, the barrage of typewriters seemed suddenly to have all stopped together, and the old orderly clerk with his hunched shoulders was bent motionless over his drawer like a living question mark, and the sentry at the colonel's door had stopped his pacing, with his automatic gun held at the port in his big red plowboy's hands. I could feel their eyes all boring at me in the silence.

Well, what was it? There was nothing wrong with my looks that I knew of. Did they think I was the colonel's fair-haired boy or something? They ought to know that he was soldier enough to have no pets. I was just an ordinary non-com in the ranks, and I didn't claim to be anything else.

"Hail the leader, corporal of Squad 3, Platoon B, Company A," said the captain-adjutant, looking at me with his lean jaw muscles knotted. "Don't ask me for any information. I don't give it out Somewhere within that thick skull of yours there must be a small spark of intelligence which is aware that your duty is to answer questions, not to ask them. You have been ordered to report to the colonel. Do as you are told. Pass him, sentry."

The sentry at the colonel's inner door looked at me stiff-faced but warily as I put my hand on the knob to open it.

"Hail the leader, buddy," I said to him apologetically, just to break the silence of those staring eyes.

"Hail the leader, Corporal," he replied unwillingly.

"Well," I said low-voiced, from the corner of my mouth, pausing a fraction before I opened the door and turning my head an inch to roll the edges of my eyes at him, "what's wrong with me? Have I got a smudge on my nose or something?"

He didn't answer me. Not aloud, that is. Standing there at my shoulder with his gun gripped across his chest, looking at me with that stiff wary look, tight-lipped. But I could see the throat muscles move beneath his immobile chin, and I could read the glint in his eyes that said, "A black smudge, yes," as plainly as if he had uttered it aloud The dirty swine! But you can't call a

man for what he says with his lips locked, and just his throat muscles moving silently. He just thought he was being funny, maybe, and didn't really mean anything by it. Still I didn't like it.

The colonel was sitting behind his great desk when I entered and closed the heavy door behind me. His sword lay on the desk in front of him. His monocle gleamed in his eye. An electric clock set in the hub of a plane propeller hung on the wall back of his head, with its red second hand sliding steadily around its face with a soft, constant clicking sound. I kept my eyes fastened on the clock as I marched forward six stiff paces and brought my heels together with a snap, thrusting out my arm in the salute.

"Hail the leader!" I recited. "Corporal of Squad 3, Platoon B, Company A, at your command, Lord Colonel. I have been ordered to report to the lord colonel for special detail."

HE was the colonel in command of the whole *gau*, which was called the *gau* of York. His name was Colonel von Pripitz, Otto von Pripitz. He was an officer of the old school, an aristocrat, and one of the old land-owning class. He was a lean stiff-backed corset-waisted man with a clipped gray mustache and goldish-silvery hair and gray imperturbable eyes.

He had been a lieutenant in one of the swank uhlan regiments when the last war broke out, and had been badly wounded by shrapnel in one of the first battles around Liege and later captured. He had spent three years in their hospitals, and after that a year more as a prisoner in one of their big country houses that had been turned into an internment camp for convalescent officers, before being released with the armistice and sent back to his home and family. A silver plate in his right arm held the bone together, and the eye at which he wore his monocle was glass.

After the war there hadn't been any uhlans any more, of course, and since his fortune was gone with the inflation and the passing of his lands to the Poles, he had had to support himself and family as best he could. He had been a language teacher and a guide for rich Americans, a book salesman and a gambling house shill, a tout and a gigolo, and times had been hard and there often hadn't been enough to eat, but he had always thought of himself as an aristocrat and how his blood was blue.

He had joined the party for a meal ticket in 1928, when his back had been against the wall, one of the first of the old aristocrat officers to come over, and they had given him a job drilling street-fighting troops and goon squads. That had been a break for him, for when the leader had come into power a few years later he had been called back into the army for staff and war planning work, and everything had been fine for him again from that time on.

Because of his four years' imprisonment in the enemy country and the knowledge he had of it he had been put in command now of this *gau*.

Some people have asked me, never having met any of these old aristocrat officers, what he was like. Well, all I can say is that he was very cold and aloof, like all of them, and it was hard at times to figure what made him tick. He knew his job and always did it well, but sometimes there was a kind of ironical look at the corner of his mouth and you wondered what maybe he was thinking. Maybe he wasn't thinking anything, of course.

Everybody said that he was a soldier through and through, just by the looks of him. And maybe he was, pretty much. Only his forehead was a little too high, it had always seemed to me, and the back of his head didn't come down quite straight and flat, as a soldier's should. Still you can't damn a man just because his head's not flat, particularly when he is a colonel and knew the leader from the old days and is in command of a whole *gau*.

I kept my eyes woodenly upon the clock behind his head. But I could see his monocle gleaming blankly as he surveyed me, and the thin ironical smile at the corner of his mouth. He was smoking a cigarette in a foot-long holder, and he knocked the ash off it with deliberation as he looked me over, like I

was some kind of a mechanical gadget.

"Hail the leader, Corporal," he answered my salute after a moment. "At ease, if you know how. I have orders here that have come through naming you. You are one of the ten non-commissioned officers of my command, it seems, on whom the axe has fallen."

I stood as stiff as wood, with my thumbs pressed along the seams of my pants so tight that my gun holster bruised my wrist. I could feel each bristle on my scalp standing motionless and waiting. In spite of having had an idea of what was coming, I felt frozen, the way he said it. I mean you could never be quite sure, no matter how loyal and upright you had always been, and always blameless and incorruptible and doing your duty with never a black mark on your record, what higher-up in the organization might have secretly turned into your enemy and made a bad report on you, even manufactured lying evidence to support it. You would think that any wearer of the ribbon would have too much honor ever to do dirty work like that and make up false reports and lie, but there are bound to be a few bad eggs like that who creep into even the noblest of organizations. If something like that had happened to me, and it was orders for concentration camp or worse that had struck me like a hammer, instead of what I had been dumbly expecting—

"The axe, Lord Colonel?" I said.

He looked at me with a twist of his mouth, as though he was hiding a quiet laugh at me, but there was something in his look which was bitter.

"I was only speaking figuratively," he said—and my heart came back into my breast again. "We are to institute drum patrols beginning Tuesday next, it seems, according to the orders, and you have been named—by alphabetical chance, it would appear—to head one of the ten squads to be sent out from this command."

I WAITED, standing at attention, while he removed the burning stub of his cigarette from the holder. He put the stub in his ash tray carefully and ground it out with his thumb. He stuck another cigarette into the holder and leaned back in his swivel chair.

"The theory behind such drum patrols, you understand," he said coldly, like a school professor trying patiently to explain a simple and obvious matter to someone who wasn't very bright, or maybe only arguing with himself—"the theory is a sound one. It is based on the well-established sociological fact that any people or nation, no matter how much it has been accustomed to prate about equality and democracy and all of that, is actually led and held together as a cohesive social unit by a comparatively small minority of its more educated, forceful, and intelligent members—by its planners and doers and shapers of opinion, its engineers, scientists, newspaper editors, military and business captains, and the rest of those who, because of superior position or education or natural endowment, are looked to as leaders in any time of crisis and disaster.

"The exact percentage of such essential leaders varies, of course, with what particular people one considers. It may amount to less than one percent; it may amount to as much as eight or ten per cent in the most advanced nations, but not above that latter figure at the outside. Deprived of that top percentage of its organizers and leaders, the theory is, no people, no matter how civilized and resourceful and advanced it appears to be, and no matter how great a swath it has cut in history, is anything more than a disorganized mob, helpless, bewildered, unable to fend for itself in any way, and soon sinking into a hopeless apathy and disruption.

"The working out of that theory is beautifully illustrated in Russia, where the elimination of no more than one half of one percent of the whole population, selectively chosen from among those at the top, reduced what had been a strong and vigorous nation, even though a backward one, into an inchoate mass of tens of millions of witless stumbling oafs, unable to build or plan anything any more, unable even to grow the elementary food necessary to keep themselves alive, unable to so much as wipe the drool off

their own chins, all of them left like a mass of helpless idiot children thrown into one great black pit together to starve and die."

He paused to snap a gold lighter open, while I stood at attention. He applied the flame to the end of his cigarette, with one cold eye half closed. He closed the lighter and put it away, exhaling smoke contentedly.

"It is even illustrated, one might say, by the history of our own great and incomparable country, Corporal, where during the long and terrible centuries of the Mongol invasions much of the best blood of each generation of our people was repeatedly destroyed by the swarms of savage, whip-driven Asiatic warriors and replaced by their own Tatar blood in the inevitable processes of biology, with the result that the percentage of low-browed and feral brutes among us was increased out of all proportion to that existing among the nations of the west, while the proportion of aristocrats, of proud free men and lordly minds, of superb and self-willed and kingly men and defiers of the whip, was reduced to a very small element indeed.

"A very small element indeed, Corporal," he repeated, "and the load on them has been heavy. At times perhaps more than they could bear. Because of that terrible loss, that loss through centuries of the best blood of our people and its replacement by the blood of the savage slaves, the veneer of civilization has remained very thin upon our great incomparable nation, and we have been handicapped in the march of history and progress for a thousand years.

"That has not been fair, of course. That has been a heavy drag upon us as a nation for which we have not been responsible. Why should we be compelled to remain satisfied with only two or five percent of aristocrats and superior men, while other and much more insignificant peoples have eight or ten? Why should a little puny Scandanavian nation with not three million total population be able to boast two brains for our one? Why should a nest of fat placid burghers living peacefully and smugly behind their water-dikes be permitted to have a hundred percent higher average intelligence quotient than our own, when we could tear through them and destroy them in four days?

"Why, to get down to the point of it, should these people here, though beaten and starving and weaponless and two-thirds of them destroyed, be allowed to continue with the same average superiority over us that they have held up to now, by the use of which some day they may still resurge, even though after a thousand years, and hurl us back into the wastes of Tartary?

"No, there is no sense in ever giving them a chance for that, it is quite obvious. There would be no fairness in it, and no justice, either. We have suffered too long under our terrible handicap. We have been too long abused.

"Unfortunately," he said, knocking the ash off his cigarette and looking at the glowing point of it a moment, "unfortunately our destruction of them preliminary to their conquest could not be selective. Just as large a proportion of their duller brains were destroyed as their bright, just as large a proportion of their weak as of their strong, and though the number of their superior men was reduced materially, it was not reduced in percent. It is only a matter of common justice to ourselves, therefore, as well as a sound military precaution, to endeavor to make things more equal between us. That, of course, may not be so easy. After all, what the Mongols did to us was the work of generations—Rome, as the saying goes, was not torn down in a day.

"Nevertheless, these drum patrols are a start in the right direction, and we may hope that by carrying them out now, and perhaps again in another ten years or so, and in another ten years still again, these people may be whittled down eventually to a percentage more nearly comparable to our own. You understand the theory behind the patrols, Corporal, I trust, and the principle to be carried out?"

HE looked at me with his cold glass eye, while I stood at attention. I didn't know what he wanted me to say, though I thought it must be something. He had

a way of talking that way at times that was hard to follow.

It was true, of course, that we had been abused. The leader had told us we had been abused, and had cried great tears about it. I have heard him hollering and crying that way to five hundred thousand men, all standing packed as solid as a sea in the great square, while the great bronze torches flared and the flags and eagles stood draped on their tall staffs that reached up to the stars and the drums rolled that made your blood run cold, and on his platform a half mile away from you in the middle of all that ocean of black helmets and white faces he would be standing beneath the white glare of floodlights like a doll, with his arms swinging and flailing and his mouth yelling open wide and the great tears pouring out of his eyes that were almost bugging out of his head.

And when he had stopped for breath and the little monkey man who always stood beside him made the signal, all of us hollering and cheering him, and the roar and the roar and the roar, "Victory hail! Victory hail! Victory hail!" from five hundred thousand throats like the barking of one great dog out of the gates of hell, because of how we had been abused.

All right, we all knew how we had been abused, and we all felt sorry for ourselves. But why did the colonel have to tell it to me now all over again, like I had never heard it? He might as well have told me that we are the only people who have got white half-moons in their fingernails and everybody else has a little colored blood, which gives them a tinge of blue, which everybody knows, too. What did he think I was, dumb or something?

He had a way of using big words that made your head dizzy. He had read books, I guess. They used to teach all officers how to read books in the old army. It was part of being an aristocrat, like dueling and knowing how to ride on horseback. And they would read their books and use big words, and that helped make them aristocrats. But if you ask me, it was just like a windmill going around, and nothing of it meant much. It was up to him to give me my orders straight. It was up to me to carry them out. And that was all there ought to be to it. Still, I figured he wanted me to say something now, though I didn't know just what it was.

"I am afraid that I don't understand much about theories and principles, Lord Colonel," I said. "if the lord colonel will pardon me."

"No," he said, looking at me with his cold eyes, a little tiredly. "I suppose you don't understand, Corporal. Theories and principles. That's not your fault, of course. Perhaps you don't just understand what drum patrols are, either. Here are the orders. I will read them to you."

AND he picked up the papers lying on his desk, screwing his monocle into his eye. He began to read them to me in his dry, cold voice, while I stood with a wooden face, looking at the clock behind his head, though I couldn't have told what time it was.

"'From the High Command,'" he read. "To Commanding Officer, Army of Occupation.

"'Subject: Drum Patrols.

"'One. A sytem of drum patrols is to be instituted beginning Tuesday, December first, midnight, and lasting throughout the month, over all the occupied country.

"'Two. Patrols will be sent out to every town and village still standing and continuing as a focus of habitation of the subject population, visiting one per day.

"'Three. These patrols will consist of the following personnel: One non-commissioned officer in command, one thirty-ton tank crew of five, twelve machine-gunners mounted on four motorcycles with sidecars and pillons, commissary truck with commissary cook and driver-pot washer, two drummers, and one pulley-man.

"'Four. Full supplies of gun ammunition, incendiary and hand-demolition bombs, flame-thrower fuel, blue-smoke fuel, etcetera, will be carried, as well as commissary supplies sufficient to provide full and liberal rations for one month—these latter being essential, since much of the countryside will be found still ravaged, gutted, and devoid of all sustenance, and no reliance can be placed therefore on amplifying supplies by forage, as ordinarily.

"'Five. In addition to the above, each patrol will be provided with a traveling derrick, or gibbet, of standard specifications, consisting of a horizontal pipe-iron bar seven feet in length, supported at each end by a pipe-iron upright seven feet in height, these latter mounted each on a pair of plain iron wheels connected by an axle seven feet in length, to the center of which axles the uprights will be fastened by a simple clinch, the axles themselves being connected by a seven foot truss, the whole device consisting in essence of a simple open pipework frame or square set up vertically and mounted on four wheels sufficiently widely spaced to give it ample footing and to afford it mobility. On the top horizontal bar three hooks equipped with block and tackle and noosed cordage will be installed, by which suspensions can be made. This item of equipment is in process of being distributed to all units.

"'Six. Provided with this equipment, each town and village will be visited. The inhabitants will be assembled in the public square or other convenient place by drum call. The leaders of them will be ascertained, and among such leaders one or more will be selected and promptly hanged in the presence of all, with full flourish and roll of drums, in the following specified numbers: if the town is of more than fifteen thousand inhabitants, three; if less than fifteen, but more than one thousand inhabitants, two; if less than one thousand, one only. In the choice of the individuals selected full latitude will be given to the judgment of the non-commissioned officer in charge; provided only that in any choice between two or more, where all other factors are equal, the younger and healthier shall be selected as against one who might be beyond the age of procreation or approaching death from natural causes. Upon completion of the ceremony of suspension of the selected man or men, the drums will roll, the assemblage will be called upon to hail the leader, and the gibbet will remain on view during the day, with regular drum rolls at each hour till sunset.

"'Seven. In cases where all persons of outstanding importance have fled from a vicinity prior to the arrival of the drum patrol, as may be anticipated in some cases at first, ten victims of any quality will be hanged instead of each one of the leaders due; in the following specified numbers, to wit: thirty in towns of more than fifteen thousand population; twenty in towns of less than fifteen thousand but more than one thousand population; ten in villages of less than one thousand. In cases where all inhabitants have fled, double the punishment will be meted out in the next town. In cases where any show of resistance is met with, or aggravated display of hostility or resentment, all inhabitants, whether overtly taking part in such demonstrations or not, will be exterminated, and the town razed.

"'Eight. These orders are in the public interest. Hail the leader!

"Signed, 'Hinschler, Chief of the Black Police, by direction.

" 'Forwarded.

" 'From Commanding Officer, Army of Occupation. To Colonel Otto von Pripitz, Commanding Officer, 10th Regiment, Commandant Gau of York.

" 'One. In obedience to above orders of the high command, copy of which is herewith provided you, you will send out ten patrols in your district.

" 'Two. To avoid the suggestion of favoritism in selecting non-commissioned officers to head these patrols, you are directed to appoint the following named non-coms on your roster, whose names have been chosen alphabetically: Sergeants Neiger, Nusshacker, Olmutz, Pabich, Corporals Pemhaus, Polsen—' Well!" the colonel said, putting the papers quietly down upon his desk again. "I've already notified the rest of them individually, and it's not up to you to know who is on the list. But your name is one of the ten, Corporal."

I stood at attention.

"Well, hail the leader!" he said, looking at me with his blank shining monocle. "Why don't you say it, Corporal?"

"Hail the leader!" I said stupidly. "At your command, Lord Colonel."

"YES, hail the leader!" he said, in his cold voice, that still had a snap like ice. "And thank the chance which has given you an opportunity to partake in this great and glorious work. Drum patrols! How psychologically effective—how simple, yet how neat. What a brilliant stroke of genius. Hail the leader!"

Only he, our great immortal leader, could have conceived just how to strike them that way so effectively, and at the proper moment, when they are altogether weaponless, when they are down upon their backs, in their deepest and complete despair, with the final culminating stroke. Drum patrols, with noncoms at the head of them, not even the honor of a commissioned officer. No fancy work upon the gibbet, either. All plain pipe-iron. Brilliant, no other word for it. I, a soldier, salute the genius of the great mind behind it. Hail the leader! Allah-il-Allah! There is only one leader, and Mahomet is his prophet. The filthy Tatar, the damned Mongol—"

He had laid down his cigarette-holder on his desk. He had reached a hand beneath the bottom side of the desk while he spoke, and had pulled forth a small round black disc about the size of a silver *thaler*, attached to a cord, from the bottom of the wood. He held it up, tightly clenched in his fist, and gaunt laughter like a skull's spread over his face, and his one eye was glassy dead behind its monocle, but the other burned with fury and living hate.

"There!" he said. "There! Let them try to hear me now! A dictograph, and some black dog at the other end of the connection listening and listening to take down every word I say! Who would believe that they would dare to do it? That even here, even here in my own headquarters, where I sit lord over this whole *gau*, Hinschler and his black-hearted, black-coated dogs would dare to try to eavesdrop and spy on me! On me, von Pripitz, younker, soldier, lieutenant once of the emperor's own uhlans, wearer of the cross and the For the Merit, with an eye and an arm and a shot-riddled body and my youth and heart and pride given for the great empire that once was, in the days when among us there were still a few of the proud old blood, of the freemen, of the lords and men of honor, of the old, old valiant knightly race, not yet all swamped and over-swamped by this damned Tatar and his horde! Me, von Pripitz, with a thousand years of blood behind me, a son of the knights, an officer once of uhlans, and none prouder beneath God or under heaven. But now this great half-breed who rules us, with his black—his black—"

He had arisen, pushing back his hair, which crashed to the floor, speechless, choking with scorn and hate, and a sweat over his forehead. Holding the black disc clenched and shaking it, as if he would crush it in his fist.

"The black swine!" he said. "The sneaking lickspittle cockroach minions of that maniac! Planting this damned thing on me! But I hold it in my fist like this and not a word comes through, while at the other end they sit and bite

their dirty fingernails and writhe because they can't hear what I'm saying.

"I hold it in my fist, and I say the great God damn them! And some day I'll jerk the damned thing off and hurl it in Hinschler's goggle-eyed spy's face, and then I'll ram it between his teeth.

"That I should be afraid of men like that! I, a younker, and a son of a thousand years of the knights, of men who fought the heathen Huns and Prussians, the Avars, Wends, and Mongols, and died crying still honor and the cross!

"I would weep, if it were not such a joke. I would laugh my head off, if I did not feel so near to tears. The goon squads and the faceless men. The whip-driven morons, brutes, and slaves. It is my shame, the shame of a younker, that I ever took the hands of men like that. For hunger, to give my dying wife a few good things, to give my boy some kind of education, I took their pay, and at first my skin crawled on my bones to do it. Yet after a while I got used to it, for even a younker prides himself that he can get used to anything, and could even fool myself that it was for a purpose, for the resurgence of our people, of their greatness and pride and strength.

"And then with the war coming, and the plans and preparations to be made for it, and all the marching millions, for a while it all seemed wonderful and fine again; it was all like the great glorious empire once again, and I swallowed him, the Mongol, and hailed him with the best. For he was giving us war, and war is a man's business.

"Back in uniform, and war, and using my brains to plan to beat the enemy, and the glory of it, and the battle and the fury, and the smashing forward rushes of the armies, that you mark with new lines of colored pins every day on the map—oh, it was all like the old empire all again. I didn't give a damn who was our leader. I was a fighting man again. And a soldier fights to win.

"All right, we've won. We've downed these people. We have downed them to their bloody knees because we had the discipline and the swarming battalions. Because we had the years and years of planning and preparation for their destruction. Because we had the thousands and thousands of thundering machines to hurl against their naked breasts, and the swarming wings, and the mountain piles of metal death, which we had built for years and years in our roaring factories day and night in the hunger and endless sweat of our uncomplaining cattle, while they were eating walnuts with their wine and prating about the brotherhood of man and peace forever more, until the hour came that was written on the wall and they arose from their feast too late.

"It's true that they took two millions of our dead; they fought us back like tigers with what few scrubby weapons they could muster; they did not yield until the price was steep; but that is war, and nothing to complain too much about so long as we have downed them.

"Fine, fine, fine, fine! We have given them all of that. They are beaten. They are through. All right, that is enough. A soldier asks for no more. Let the remnants of them starve or let them survive as best they can, scratching the blasted ground around the ruins of their perished cities. It is no concern of ours what happens to them now. But our honor is our own concern. And it is not within our honor to give them the rope."

HIS lean face was sweating. He leaned upon his knuckles on his desk. His glassy eyes looked straight through me and beyond me.

"Why, after all," he said, sweating, "they are people. There is nothing soft about me. But they are people, after all. I was a prisoner among them, a helpless prisoner, and there is no man who wears the uniform who has more cause to hate them. Still they are human; I can certify to that. They took care of my wounds with their best skill in hospital.

"They had me in one of their great country houses after that—good books and music, movies and entertainment, food fit for a king. We prisoners used to go fox-hunting on fine frosty autumn mornings and have tea every afternoon. They didn't treat me too barbarously, I couldn't say in all fairness.

"I felt an unquenchable hatred of them, it is true, and will always feel it, because they were our enemies, and because they held me prisoner, a lieutenant of uhlans, and none prouder under God. Still I always felt that they were human, even so. Why, there was the old colonel who was warden over us, a fat-faced fellow who kept us in cigars out of his own pocket, and I used to play chess with him every evening after dinner, and he played a good game, too.

"And when the war was over, and I went back to all that misery and defeat and blackness and despair, and my wife sick with tuberculosis and my son a bundle of little bones from malnutrition, scavanging in the garbage-pails of alleys like a rat, and no food or money, and me a man who knew only war, why, there were some of these same people, whom they call Friends, who helped us.

"They had come into our country just to help us. God knows why they did it, but they did. I went to them with my hate and pride—me, a younker, having to ask help or to beg! I could have killed them for the shame that I was in, yet I had heard that they were there to help us, and I must do it, because my belly was starving, and my wife and boy on the streets.

"And they didn't spit in my face; they didn't even laugh to see me begging at their door. As if I had been one of their own they took me in. Gave me their best room and waited on me. Got me a job managing horses out in the country after a week, the best that could be done, and pretty despicable, but enough to keep my bones together, and with horses a man is still a gentleman. Scraped up money enough to send my wife to a place in the mountains, too, where she could get food and good clean air. Kept my boy with them as their own, and when their funds ran out and they had to go back to their own country here they brought him with them, treating him as their own son for years, until things had begun to look a little better for me and I could send for hm.

"Not younkers, of course. Not people of fine pedigree. But there are times, perhaps, when one does not insist too much on things like that. Why, yes, they were the same people. Human beings. In their way, not bad at all. And we are going to give them drum patrols, now that we have them beaten to their knees. The traveling gibbet and inexorable death. At the command of a maniac Mongol. That's a job for a soldier, isn't it! For a younker and the son of a thousand years of knights."

I stood like wood. I did not know anybody could talk like that, could use words like that about the leader without keeling over and dying. I don't know what a Mongol is, but except for that it wasn't too hard to understand him. He was talking straight now, and not with his big words. I did not move, nor change my expression, though. It was up to him to talk. It was not up to me. I stood without a muscle twitching and my face wooden and my eyes fastened on the clock in the propeller hub on the wall behind him, though what the time was I couldn't say.

"Ah, Carl!" he said, with a bitter ironic look at me. "Quite the automaton, aren't you? You may unbend with me. You don't need to be afraid of what you say. This is one place where the black ones are not listening. Behind that wooden face of yours, drilled by them since the days of your youth, I know there must burn deep in your brain a shame and despising as great as mine against this maniac that we stretch forth our arms to and hail as God, who would order this thing against a beaten people.

"You are not a mental genius, Carl. There is no great content of learning or philosophy in your mind. Hard things have happened to you in your life, and you have known hunger and misery and shame. But those things happen. Who am I to say they were a man's own fault? You were a child of the lost generation, of defeat and despair, and you are not responsible altogether, certainly, for whatever course your life has taken. Somewhere underneath your hide the blood in you is still good. In some things, blood must tell. At least you are a soldier. You can take the wooden mask off. They won't even hear. You've been damned for this vile work by damndest chance, but you don't have to go through

with it, thank God. I can give you a way out.

"Confidentially, I have talked already with Nusshacker and Olmutz and the rest of those men who were named in the orders with you. They are brave and decent soldiers all, and though at first they were a little afraid to express their feelings to me, and like you kept their faces wooden and would say nothing, still after a while they did come through, each one of them as one honest man does with another, and confessed that they were sick at the idea of it, and that it was no business for a soldier.

"And so I agreed with each of them to have them put on report by their platoon commanders on some trumped up charge of a minor nature, not sufficient to incur them any serious punishment, but just enough to justify me in breaking them. Reduced to the ranks, they will no longer be qualified as leaders of these patrols. If the black business must be done, let it be done by Hinschler's own executioners, and not by soldiers.

"Unbend your wooden face, Carl," he said, smiling at me with his thin ironic smile, looking at me tiredly. "If we can't trust each other, who can? I will instruct your platoon commander to do the same for you, and no one but us shall know it. Come on, speak up! Don't stand like a wooden man. In God's name, at ease between us."

I STOOD at attention, looking at the clock behind his head. "Have you your pistol, Lord Colonel?" I said.

"My pistol?" he glared at me bewilderedly. "No, I don't think so. I haven't noticed it for the last day or two on the nail it generally hangs from. My orderly probably has taken it for cleaning. What about my pistol?"

"The clock," I said.

"The clock?" he said.

"The clock behind your head," I said to him. "It became known some days ago that you had discovered the instrument beneath your desk, Lord Colonel, and had found how to silence it. So that on the other end one might be patiently listening and taking notes, and you would be talking about this or that of no importance, and then the word would suddenly be cut off, and no word more come through.

"My company captain, my own Lord Captain Weich of Company A—you may recall that one afternoon last week he sat in your office talking, and that night he got sudden orders to depart. Two men in black came to him in the night with the orders. My Lord Colonel, and he went out between them with his head upon his breast. It had been some talk of fingernails, I believe, which had occurred in your office. And perhaps he had the pleasure of pulling out his own before he died.

"The talk involved my lord captain only, it was fortunate, for my lord colonel's talk, as always, was cold and circumspect and discreet. But it was known from that time that the instrument beneath your desk could not be trusted, because you could silence it at will. Therefore the clock."

"The clock?" he said again, and his face was gray.

"It is wired, Lord Colonel," I said. "A dictograph is behind it, connected to a recording machine. Every word that you have spoken since I came in here is down upon the tape."

I lifted up the flap of my left breast tunic pocket then, and showed him the black ribbon.

"Ah!" he said, with his gray face, the muscles of it twitching. "I have heard them say that you were one of them. I have heard them say that they suspected you. But I would not believe it."

I relaxed my stiff right arm that I held rigidly at my side. I reached and took his sword from the desk in front of him. I drew the blade forth and dropped the scabbard on the floor. I took the blade in my two hands, and snapped it across my knee. I threw the pieces skittering across the floor, with a dull ringing sound, while he watched me, gray of face.

"You have authority for that?" he said.

"Full plenary authority," I said, "for all."

I unbuttoned my holster flap then. I took out my pistol, and laid it on his desk in front of him.

He got to his feet. His hand shook as he reached across the desk and took the gun. He gripped the butt of it and unlatched the safety catch with his thumb. He brought it up slowly, and his hand was steady now.

"The day was cursed when you were conceived," he said. "It had been better if the midwife who brought you forth had dashed your head against the wall. No human blood is in you. When your life is ended you will lie forever in eternal hell. This earth will be a sweeter place when you are out of it. What is there to prevent my shooting you, did you consider that, you moronic fiend?"

"This," I said.

And I pulled out his own pistol which I had in a shoulder holster inside the breast of my tunic. My own, which I had given him, was not loaded. I had not expected him to use it. There was something unstable and treacherous in him which must be provided against, even in the moment of death. Beneath his cold, impeccable manner I had long read that treachery and instability in him towards the leader, and had known that in the last pinch he would not be a soldier. So I had come prepared to do do him the honor with his own gun that he should have done himself. Not that I regretted having to do it, for I have never liked these old aristocrats. I had executed one far higher in rank than he, in the back, in Poland. . . .

THE echoes roared and roared. They must resound, it seemed to me, over the whole station. And perhaps over the whole *gau,* and to the pit of hell. The smoke was acrid and stinging. I stood a moment stiffly, with my hand sinking to my side. Then I tossed the pistol onto the desk beside his sprawled body and fallen head, and retrieved my own which I had given him, reholstering it.

So passes, I thought, another aristocrat and an officer of the old school. His damned blood and pride! Yet he had been a good soldier, almost. Only that his forehead had been a little too high, and the back of his head had not come down quite straight and flat, as a soldier's should.

Outside the door in the outer office the raw-boned sentry paced up and down, three steps forward, and three back, with his gun held at the port, his eyes staring glassily ahead of him. The barrage of typewriters clacked in frantic, steady haste. The old orderly clerk was bent over his files, so low his face was almost at his knees, picking through them with a veined, fumbling hand. The captain-adjutant sat at his desk writing, writing. And no one looked up at me at all as I came out, and no one said a word.

I passed by the sentry, and he did not see me; his swaying face was white; he looked beyond me. I passed by the bending old orderly clerk, and his hands shook, shook, as he sorted letters in his files, not looking up, with a rustling noise like rats in paper. I passed by the typists, and their heads were bent low in a bobbed row above their machines, while their fingers clacked and clacked. I stood at the captain-adjutant's desk, and he was writing, writing.

"The lord colonel has just shot himself," I said. "It is my duty to report."

"Yes," said the captain-adjutant, breathing in, not looking up. "Yes, we had all rather expected something like that, Corporal. The colonel has been a little nervous and unwell. Too much tension and responsibility. I've been afraid for some time that his mind was affected, and that something like that would result. Well, too bad.

"Thank you for telling me anyway, Corporal von Pripitz," said the captain-adjutant. "Hail the leader."

"Hail the leader," I returned his salute, and started towards the door.

"Oh, Corporal," he said, and I paused. wondering what was in his brain now. "About what disposal is to be made—You, as his nearest of kin, his son—"

"Let the dead bury their dead," I said. "All these old aristocrats with their honor and their pride. With their books and their brains and their big words. Let all be dead and buried. I have no time for an aristocratic dust. I am a soldier of the leader, marching humbly in the ranks towards our great future. Hail the leader."

"Hail the leader, Corporal," he said. "Hail our great leader."

He leaped for her throat—and it was suicide on the move!

COMMON GROUND

By TOM ROAN

IT WAS a fearful place for Klatawa, the big she-boss of the high Rockies. For a thousand-pound grizzly that measured nine feet from tip to tip, it was exceedingly embarrassing. Fear was no part of her. Outside of a skunk, nothing that walked on four legs or flew on wings could make her give ground, especially when it came bullying forward with bristles lifted and teeth clicking, its every manner one that showed an arrogant itching to fight.

The bear was almost to the smooth wall of rock that would mark the end of the ledge in the great cliffs. Once that spot was reached there would be no more

room to retreat. The wall was too smooth for even a skunk to scale it. There she would soon be, perched a mile in the air with the rushing river in the timbered valley to westward only a white streak below. Klatawa would have to do something about this thing.

She turned and again tried to bluff with her fiercest growls and most ferocious snarls. The skunk turned also, and as quickly as a mink, lifted her tail to show that she would stand for none of that huff and bluff business.

It was such a persistent skunk! Klatawa outweighed her by every ounce of her nine hundred and ninety-seven pounds. With one slap she could smash the thing into a red smear on the rocks, but she wanted none of that. She wanted none of the odor that would come from such an act. She had met the skunk before, and others just like it, and no grizzly that ever walked was foolish enough to meddle with a skunk a second time.

Fortunately, skunks were not always so quarrelsome. This particular one seemed to have a grudge against all grizzlies. She was always appearing at the wrong moment, and Klatawa had given way in front of her slow attacks so often in the past it was getting to be a nightmare every infernal time she caught the terrible scent of the creature.

Beetles tickled the palate of any grizzly, and the skunk seemed to know just where and when Klatawa was going in search for them. It appeared to have the diabolical habit of lying down-wind from the selected spot, and then coming forward when Klatawa rolled over a rotted log. There the trouble exploded. The skunk was never in a hurry about it. She simply came bristling up, the tail ready, and Klatawa gave ground, allowing the pest to lap up the juicy beetles while the bear took herself off with such dignity as she could muster under the circumstances.

Once there had been a calamity. Klatawa had found herself quarreling with a scarred old male bear over a six-point buck they had downed. It was a juicy kill. Both bears were hungry. They remained hungry. The skunk had appeared from nowhere. Fortified with four kittens all loaded with enough musk to make any bear unable to live with himself for a week, they had moved in with tails lifted. The old male had been a greedy fellow determined to stand his ground. All five of the devilish cats had let go a concentrated charge, and it was the sad end to the beginning of a toothsome meal.

Literally Klatawa had kissed her part of the deer farewell. She had turned tail to it the moment she recognized the war was on. The old male received the five-round volley in the face and eyes, and up and down his hairy belly. He had shot in the air with a wail of terror and anger, an old beast popping his rump with his forepaws. The second five-cat charge caught him as his hind feet came back to earth. He had bowled over, turning a flip-flop backward somersault in the air. Half-blinded and suffocated by the musk, he had started hog-jumping after Klatawa. The she-bear had knocked him sprawling with a right swing when he came alongside, and for more than two weeks thereafter she had had no more to do with the evil-smelling brute.

NOW it was the manifestation of righteous arrogance for the skunk. It showed what she could do, once provided by nature with something that allowed her to strike fear into the heart of an enemy she thought a natural one. Here was the opportunity to glorify herself with the feeling of power, to cast forth her spell. Strength to fight she had none. She knew that, but, at the same time, she felt secure enough, because there were holes in the rocks into which she could dodge if the giant brute happened to wheel to stop it all with one blow.

If the bear stumbled and tumbled off the ledge to useless broken bones and flesh a mile below, it would not matter in the least. As long as life was in the skunk she could remember that she was one day mistress of the ledges, the ruler supreme of a whimpering brute walking like a man and weeping like a child; a brute that could blow her into eternity with one breath.

It was more than fun. The bear kept on, a whimpering and quarreling thing,

and when she rounded a sharp bend the skunk saw that the ledge had come to an end. Now the bear would have to climb!

But suddenly the bear turned, and the first prick of alarm came to the skunk. The bear was like an army about to throw itself upon its general. Here now would be the test, fear over fear. The skunk wheeled. Her tail came up, but the dreaded musk did not rise in its golden-yellow mist. The skunk held her fire, knowing that once she let loose she would have no threat.

Besides, a black shape down the ledge made the skunk halt the game she was playing and suddenly wish she had never started it. She had met the black shape before. He was one thing she could not bluff! She had seen him kill and devour her four kittens before even a polecat could blink its eye. Musk had not stopped the black one—and musk would not stop him now!

He was a brawny beast, half-dog and half great black timber wolf. His right eye was gone. Fang or claw-stroke in some desperate engagement in the past had left only a puckered black scar where an eye should have been. His fighting fangs had grown to stubs, and his scarred red muzzle had turned as white as the snow on the distant peaks.

No longer able to ham-string and pull down deer, the wolf-dog had learned to knock over what he could to keep life and belly together. If the smell of a skunk in the past had daunted his appetite, it no longer troubled him. He had come out of a hole somewhere down the ledge, one too small for the bear to enter, and the scent of the skunk promised an afternoon meal.

The skunk did the only thing she could do. All eyes peering at every hole before the coming of the wolf-dog, she shot to one side, dropping instantly out of sight in an opening just large enough to admit her, and she was gone for the day, leaving wolf-dog and bear facing each other on the ledge.

WOLF-DOG and bear stood looking at each other, the common ground of fear between them making their bristles stand on end. The dog's nose had grown old and weak with his years. His eye was not as keen as it had been in the past. Then there was the smell of the skunk on the ledge, and it was a smell strong enough to smother all other smells.

The wolf-dog crouched and snarled, a brute all growl and bluff, and ready to heel about and flee for his life. Here was an enemy! At least he had always considered her ilk enemies.

She was huge and powerful, a beast standing there like a man, one that had the habit now and then of walking like a man!

He remembered men, and the memory of them was not good. And there was the bear's great size. It alone was enough to make her a terror. Never had he seen the day when he could tangle with her and expect anything other than to have his head slapped clear of his shoulders with but a half-hearted blow of either forepaw.

He started backing away, still bristling and growling, and wanting no part of a quarrel with the likes of that great beast.

The bear sat back on her rump. She cocked her head from side to side, and looked incredulously toward the hole where the skunk had gone. She growled when she looked back at the wolf-dog. Somehow he, too, reminded her of men, those two-legged creatures who would be coming in the fall. With gangs of dogs and guns they would arrive, pitching up their queer dens here and there, and making more noise than forty flocks of Canadian honkers flying southward for the winter.

A dog meant trouble. Klatawa had always known that, and yet there was something fascinating in one of the brutes. He had done what Klatawa had never been able to do. He had sent a skunk flying for a hole. The skunk had not even argued with him. The skunk had taken but one look at him. He had not snarled, he had not made a sound—and yet that skunk had scurried away at the sight of him!

It was something to make even a grizzly ponder. She did not trust the brute in front of her. He was an alien, a four-legged fellow with a bad name. She did

not understand him; he did not understand her. Like peoples of the world under the same handicap, mistrust spelled hate, and hate spelled fear.

Klatawa was awed, but she tried to be noncommittal about it. She looked westward, at the sky and mountain-clad distance. Even a bear could show that she was not interested in fighting. When she looked back at the dog he had lost some of the wickedness in his snarl.

Fear held them to their places. Klatawa wanted to risk no fight on the narrow ledge. High up here one did not jump and bounce about like two bucks fighting over a doe. Besides, there was the little matter of the skunk. It had become a great matter to Klatawa, and the more the thought of it ran through her brain, the more respectful she became to the wolf-dog. Gratitude was there in its way. He had actually rescued her from a most embarrassing situation. For the moment she did not want him to turn away. She had yet to pass the hole where the skunk was in hiding, and the thought of the cantankerous pest suddenly returning was not a pleasant one.

Had a gun fired somewhere the bear would have been thrown into a killing rage. The sound of a gun would have spelled danger, and the feeling of danger would have heightened the fear. She would have associated the wolf-dog with the gun, and instantaneous thunder would have gone into action.

Her calmness helped. She looked again at the hole where the skunk had taken refuge so hastily she had not had time to fire a parting shot. Her satisfaction grew enough to allow her to yawn and lick her chops. The wolf-dog's one eye met her eyes. He had quit snarling. It never came to Klatawa then that she was going to like that brute in spite of herself. It never came to her that she was already being beset with a stealing, creeping desire to know more of this shaggy fellow who could make a skunk flee at the very sight of him. . . .

When the dog turned away he did not do it with a wild start. He kept growling, and he kept his bristles up, trying to say, in a dog's way, if anything jumped on him he would make the fur fly and do most terrible things, yet—at the same time—he was hoping for the best. His stiff-leggedness was not mere strut. He knew those legs well, had used them before to take himself away in a hurry when too hard-pressed, and was ready for just that now.

He was relieved when the bear did not come after him in a rush, but it took an iron will to keep himself out of plunging into a run when she did start down the ledge.

The rest of it was truly the art of leaving a dangerous spot with dignity. The dog liked that, but he would have liked it far better had it been some other dog on a ledge with a grizzly bear. He kept up his strut. He was never better when he put on his best air of unconcern, but it was dreadful temptation to dart back into the hole he had come from.

His dignity increased as he neared the foot of the mile-long ledge and running space began to gradually widen around him. Here, now, he could show that bear a lot of things. Actually it would be his tail and heels. He knew it, but he was not going to let the bear know it if he could possibly help it.

A chance came to quit it all when he was on the bend of a spur of the ledge only five hundred feet above the river. Here was a crack in the rocks, and he swung into it. Once before, up this way, he had made his escape from a hunting party's bullets and a gang of noisy dogs. He knew the way well, and this was his opportunity to get away from the bear and allow her to go on down the ledge alone.

But he had not gone far before the *click-clack* of sharp claws on the rocks told him the bear was following him. It did not worry him. She was keeping her distance, and soon he would be at a hole into which he could glide, and the hole would carry him up and up to the very top of the cliffs, leaving the bear stranded there in the rocks with nothing left for her to do but turn back and go on about her business.

The shock came when he discovered that a recent rock slide had filled the hole. Now a real panic gripped him. Just around a sharp bend there would be

nothing but a round pit, and he was going to be trapped!

He whined, and started to turn back. The sight of the bear drove him on. He turned the bend with his good eye cocked back over his shoulder. A fierce snarl halted him in his tracks with every bristle lifted.

Again his battle-scarred old nose had failed him. Ahead of him, flat on their yellow bellies, were two cougars, an enormous male and a female. He gave them his best snarl. Cougars were cowardly fellows. He knew all about them. They were more given to running than to fighting. He had chased them in the past. He had even chased them away from their kills of bucks and does.

He saw the male turn, looking up at the rocks for some way of escape. It came to him then that the cougars had no way to escape, no way to turn tail and get out of his way. He eased to the left, hoping they would sidle to the right and make a rush down the crack to meet the bear and fight it out with her.

The cougars started to sidle. The wolf-dog could see that they were willing enough to avoid trouble, but they took only a few paces before the female let out a shriek that filled the pit with terror. She had caught wind of the bear, and a snarl from her big mate an instant later told that he, too, had caught a whiff of the bear.

With every hair on end, the wolf-dog kept on. It was better to fight two cougars than a grizzly! A grizzly had never turned tail to him. Cougars had. It had not been because they could not have stood their ground and made a sorry sight of him. Any cougar could kill a wolf or a dog if it would only stand and fight, but fear was an enemy a cougar could not master as long as there was a chance for it to run.

Suddenly the female charged. Like a rat in a trap and faced by the cat, there was no alternative for her. She could not run—she had to fight!

The wolf-dog was quick enough about it. He leaped to one side, the wolf in him making him spar for a shoulder shot that might knock the terror-stricken she-devil off her feet and bare her belly or throat long enough for him to rip it wide open and bring the battle to a quick end.

He stumbled and went down. He had forgotten his age, the worn fangs, and the fact that he was blind on one side. But it was not for long. He plunged to his feet like something bouncing and momentarily got out of the way.

Immediately now the big male was into it. A claw stroke landed on the dog's shoulder. He was down again, this time rolling across the pit. Both cougars shot after him. Quick death was in the air. In a split-second it would have struck, but a terrifying growl freighted with tremendous force and brute damnation suddenly about to be let loose whirled the cougars away just before they could finish their job.

The bear had arrived. With a glance she had taken in the situation. There she stood, reared to her hind feet and looking larger than a mountain, her piggish little eyes aglint with sheer wickedness and her great forepaws out-thrust as if to crush everything in the pit in one fierce embrace.

More afraid of the bear than they would have been of four dogs, the cougars dropped to the rocks, ears flat against their heads, tails lashing, all set to leap and try to fight their way out.

The wolf-dog went into it. Fear had charge of everything here! It was panic personified. Instinctive driving force inside the wolf-dog's terrified brain knew only fight. Fighting alone would take him out of here!

With a snarl the female knocked him sprawling. Before he could get up the bear was moving in. The big male leaped for her throat—and it was suicide on the move! There was a ripping sound like ice breaking in the spring. The bear had struck with lightning swiftness. A squawling cat went smashing against the rocks with every rib broken along his left side.

The female was next. She was just fool enough to think she could dart past the bear. The grizzly broke her neck and crushed her skull with one down-popping blow that smashed her into Kingdom Come.

But the big male was not yet dead.

In spite of his broken ribs he charged again. A slashing forepaw tore half his head off and filled the pit with the hot smell of blood, and both huge cats were out of the fight, having met the mistress of hell herself, and found death quicker here than the blink of an eye.

THE wolf-dog got up dazedly. He was hurt now. Resignation was in his eye, and somewhere back in his befuddled brain he hoped it would be done quickly. There was the bear. All she had to do was to move in. He knew his weakness. One stroke of a great paw would kill him, and yet the scarred old muzzle wrinkled into a trembly snarl that tried to tell the bear he was not going down without showing her his fighting mettle.

But the bear did not charge. She looked at the dead cougars, smelled them, and lapped up a little of the blood. She was not a particular feeder. She was not beyond even a rattlesnake now and then when, with a neat blow, she could crush its head. All other bears might run away from any kind of a snake, but a grizzly could take one with relish, along with a couple of dozen gophers, a few jackrabbits, honey, berries, and certain barks and herbs. She ripped open a hide, raked it to one side to bare the warm red meat, and started to eat.

The dog watched for a long time. Saliva started to drool from his mouth. Hunger got the best of his fear. He whined and eased forward. The bear ignored him when he started tearing into the meat. She growled only once, halting long enough to stare at him for a moment with a wicked gleam in her eyes. In that moment she weighed life and death inside her wicked head—and decided to allow her newly-found object of curiosity to live. Because he could not run away, the wolf-dog growled back at her. After that they ate, sometimes shoulder to shoulder, sometimes wolf-dog on one side, the bear on the other.

IT WAS the beginning of things. Each yet had thousands of years of intolerance to overcome. Race hatred in a fashion was still there. One did not dare to unbend to the other. And yet they needed each other. The wolf-dog sensed it; the bear sensed it. Ages-old feud alone stood between them, and neither knew why or how it had started. They were too much like people. They had never bothered to stop and think about it.

He left her when darkness settled, but they met again when morning came. The meeting was back at the kill of the two cougars. There they growled and snarled at each other, and then remembered that there was some kind of a truce between them. They again gorged. They again went down to the river to drink. When night came again he followed her up the ledge and almost to her den, and then sat down on an outjutting spur of rock to howl long and mournfully to the growing light of the moon on the lonesome hills and white peaks turning golden out of the darkness.

An answering wail came back to him from the top of one of the timbered ridges across the valley. It was long and lone, a far-reaching cry laden with sad intensity. An all-blending, many-noted bugle sound, it swept across the valley, echoing against the ledges and rocking back to the ridge. In it there was all the fierce challenge of the wilds, the I-am-it, God-of-my-domain—if you do not like it come forth and fight!

The wolf-dog's bristles lifted. A growl formed in his throat. He knew the maker of that sound. It came from old Red Eye, the huge black timber wolf, the fighting king and strutting bully of his pack. One half of him was blood-brother to the wolf-dog. The dog in the brute on the ledge made them sworn enemies. It ostracized him from the great wolf packs, and the wolf in him made him an outcast from the dogs in the lower hills, where he would have otherwise found companionship.

He started to answer Red Eye's second challenging wail, but fear of the big brute and his kind trailing with him made him silent. He turned back along the ledge, and found a hole in which he could hide. When morning came he was again ready to meet the bear, and this time he was looking forward to it.

All summer long it was like that. Fear of each other was on the wane, but it was something that would take a long time to die. It was still there when hunters came in the fall. The guns roared, and men went back to civilization with the incredulous tale of a strange pair of companions that had out-witted them and their fine dogs at every turn.

Klatawa knew nothing of the tales. She would have cared less. Skunks no longer troubled her. They got out of the way the moment she appeared, knowing that there was black destruction somewhere close by, and that that black destruction would come on the fly at the first whimper from the bear.

Bullies of the high places they were, and as bullies they ruled. The November winds increased. A listless pall cast its spell over the skies for days at a time. Klatawa was late in the act of filling her stomach with clay and going to her den for the long winter sleep when December came.

But she grew restless. There were many times when she led the wolf-dog up the ledge and tried to coax him into her den. It was the one place where he drew the line. They could down a kill, they could devour it shoulder to shoulder, and they could lick each other's chops when the meal was over, but venture into her den he would not! He would follow her to the low entrance of it, and there he would halt, a respectful fellow knowing his place and keeping one ear cocked to be on his feet the instant he heard her coming.

IT WAS like that until the late afternoon when he came upon old Red Eye and four of his bullies at the foot of the ledge and suddenly found himself trapped with the bear nowhere in sight.

The battle started with apparent fairness, but it did not end that way. Red Eye was old at the game. His four brothers of the forest were wise to all such things as shady tricks. They sprang away in a circle, leaving the giant black timber wolf and the hopeless wolf-dog facing each other across three yards of snow.

In a moment the battle was on. Red Eye started it with a strut. Stiff-legged, he started to circle the wolf-dog, giving all the signs that he would sniff and growl for some time and possibly not fight at all if the wolf-dog would be meek about it. He was a beastly old liar, and the wolf-dog knew it. He drove in for the usual shoulder shot to carry the wolf-dog off his feet, but for once he underestimated his foe.

The wolf-dog leaped clear, snarling as loudly as he could. He whipped back, caught Red Eye a glancing blow, staggered him, and again they were apart, with the wolf-dog knowing that if he once downed his foe and got the best of him he would have the others to fight.

When the next attack came, the wolf-dog showed one of the good fighting tricks he had learned in the past. He did not leap to one side this time. He braced himself and took the full impact of Red Eye's blow on the shoulder. It was hard, sounding like two bones slapping together, and for an instant Red Eye was down.

It was the wolf-dog's chance. He shot in, seized a mouthful of belly, and surged back. Where in the old days he would have disemboweled his victim with one neat stroke, the worn fangs now slipped. He shot back, floundering in the snow. Before he could get up, Red Eye was upon him, a beast growling for the others to keep back while he made his kill.

But the wolf-dog came up in spite of him. He came up hurt, the blood dripping, one eye blazing its fighting fury, scarred old muzzle snarling. Red Eye got him down again with a shoulder-shot to the rump, and as he went down he let out one fierce, half-wailing cry of terror.

It was murder and nothing short of it, and yet he came up, an old fellow selling out his life the best he could, determined to go down to the very end showing his colors as a fighting gentleman of the hills. Luck was with him for an instant. He got in one desperate stroke, a smash-grab to the side of Red Eye's face, and managed to slash the wolf's cheek to the bone.

But it was not a fight to last. With the four hungry wolves looking on and eagerly licking their chops at the sight and smell of the blood, one of them could

not contain himself. He slipped in behind the wolf-dog, and caught him by a leg, dragging him backward to make the kill easier for Red Eye.

It was at that moment that hell exploded in the fray. She came like the devil in a hurry, up on her hind feet, great paws thrust upward and forward, every foreclaw unsheathed and a killing rage burning in her wicked little eyes. She caught a wolf with a downward-raking blow.

Red Eye, with the death-grip already fastened, released his hold and tried to leap clear. A smashing claw broke his hips, and he went down with a snarl, conscious that one of his companions was already killed and the two others whirling on their hind-quarters and fleeing for their lives.

But the great bear was not yet through. Fury was here. She smashed Red Eye another blow. Even with his hips broken, he had tried to turn on her, dragging his splintered bones and snarling his best. She smacked his skull into a pulp, and then proceeded to pound and re-pound him into jelly. She walked on him. She tore him apart. She made a frightful mess of red and black in the snow, and then tore the second wolf to shreds.

The wolf-dog had backed away to lick his wounds and eye her dubiously. For a moment it looked as if she would charge him. It was there in her eye, the hate and fury gleaming for an instant, but it vanished as quickly as it came. She nosed forward, smelled him, and started licking the blood from the side of his face as if he had been a cub.

They went up the ledge when it was over. The wolf-dog kept his place a few yards behind her heels.

At the mouth of the den the wolf-dog halted, the curse of fear coming back to him. The bear went on inside. She came back, nosed him with a come-along sniff, and turned once more into the den. When she returned a second time she lifted a paw as if to smack him on into the den ahead of her just as she would have handled an unruly cub.

But the wolf-dog leaped away from the stroke. He was not going into that den, and that was all there was to it! But he was lonesome when she was gone. He watched the gathering darkness close around him.

He stood up, shivering. The wind cut through him. He whined. At last he turned into the den. He could no longer stand it there on the ledge, and timidly he advanced, a step at a time. The warm air of the den was inviting. He kept on, halting and whimpering. A growl finally answered him. He dropped to his belly. After a long time he got up, easing on. Desperation got the best of him. With final straight, sure steps, he made his way close to the bear. She was warm and snug there in a deep pocket of the den. He crept the last two paces, and snuggled himself up against her warm and hairy belly. For a minute he waited, his muscles tensed for a wild spring to safety. A deep breath of resignation followed. After that all fear died. Faith took its place. A long-tired but exceedingly delightful feeling came over him, and wolf-dog and bear slept, each glad of each other's warmth.

Pugs and wrestlers—gunsels and brain-guys—shams and private eyes—chiselers and chiseled—wenches and a lady—and Smith—

CELLINI SMITH

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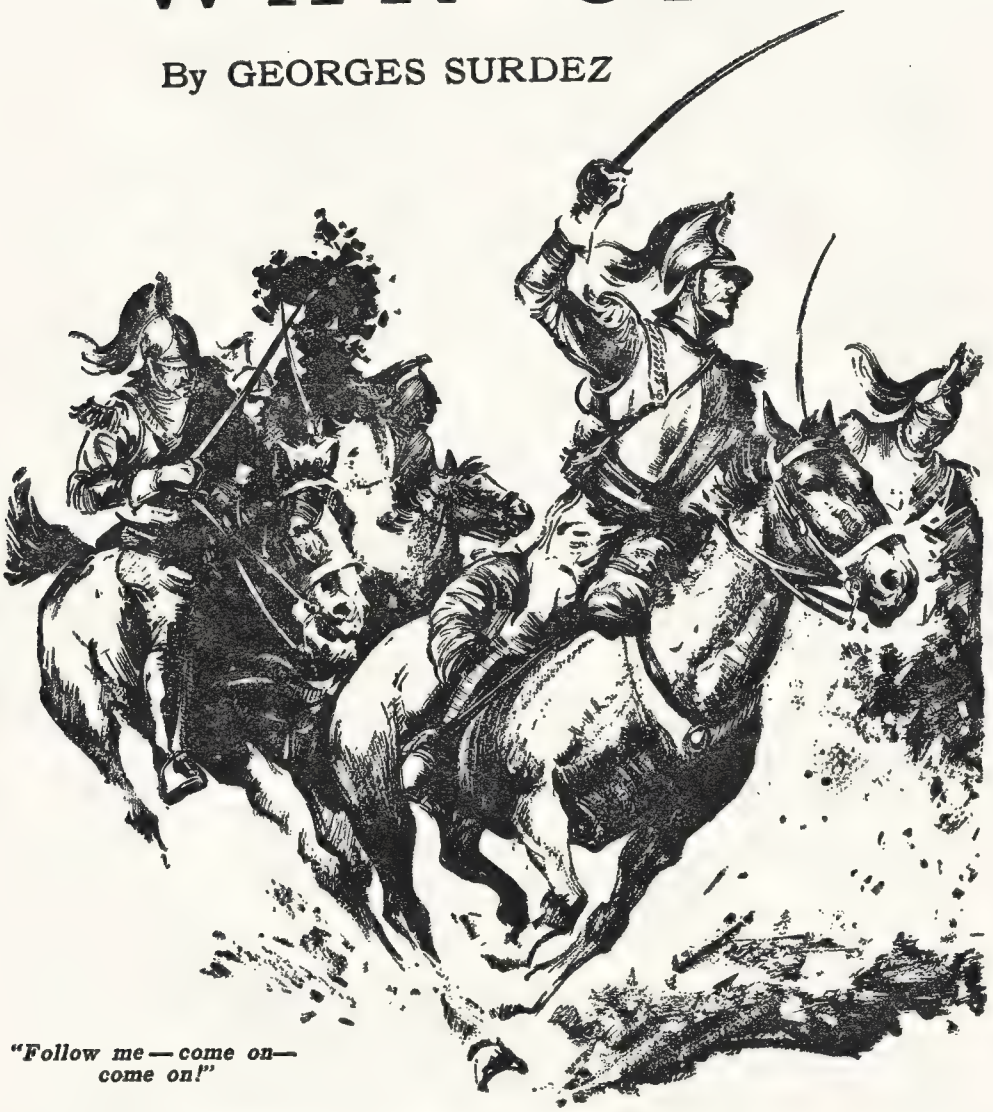


"Follow me — come on— come on!"

"THERE they are, Lieutenant!"

"I see them. Draw back into the wood a bit, slowly." Bernard de Marnac fingered the hilt of his sword nervously. His feet sought the stirrups. The enemy was in sight, and only four days after he had joined the regiment. He was lucky.

"Uhlans, Lieutenant," Sergeant Crisal stated.

The officer shrugged with some impatience as he followed his men under the cover of the trees. According to popular belief, all German riders armed with lances must be uhlans. "They're not uhlans. Probably dragoons. But it's all the same to us."

"Right, Lieutenant."

There were three of them, still quite a distance away, gray silhouettes on tall bay horses, further elongated by spiked helmets and lances. They came at a trot. But before long, they drew rein, halted, cautious and alert, like wild animals scenting the air. Then one came on along the highway, drawing

nearer and nearer. He stopped, stood on the stirrups, craned his neck to peer all about. If he discerned the French soldiers on the hillock flanking the road, he gave no sign. He turned deliberately, returned toward his comrades in a few galloping strides, and all three vanished at a slow trot.

"Scouts!" Crisal opined.

"Wouldn't surprise me," de Marnac agreed with irony. "Have a man ready to take back a message. We'll wait a few minutes to see if others show up."

He was very calm outwardly. Many of his ancestors, when men presumably matured more rapidly, had faced the

enemy when fourteen or fifteen years old.

He was barely twenty years old, had been graduated ahead of time a few days before from the Military Academy at St. Cyr, due to the declaration of war. Like all his classmates, he had to face the enemy for the first time, to receive the baptism of fire, in full school regalia. Therefore, although he had been assigned to a regiment of *cuirassiers*, his lanky, athletic body was garbed in the blue and scarlet uniform of the Cadets. On his head was the high shako with the two-colored plume, the *casoar*. On his hands were white parade gloves.

He cast a glance back at his men.

There were twenty of them. Halted on the fringe of the wood, they formed a startling, archaic vision. Their helmets glittered brassily; breast-plates gleamed, silvered by the dull sunlight seeping through the leafage. Chin-straps of copper-scales barred their cheeks; long cues of horse-hair slithered down to their armored shoulders from the high, arched ridges of the metal headgears, ornamental ridges flanked by smart little colored plumes.

But for minor details of uniform and equipment, saddles, bits and boots, and the scarlet breeches, these *cuirassiers* of France were identical to their predecessors, the legendary heavy cavalry of the empire, the massive, heroic regiments which had charged so gallantly, ninety-nine years ago at Waterloo, forty-four years back at Morsbronn, Elsasshausen and Sedan

The picture was perfect at first, like a painting by Detaille; then it could be seen that the men were not the hairy, bronzed, scarred veterans of the Napoleonic fields, but youngsters in their early twenties. Nevertheless, they were picked men, tall, large and sturdy

De Marnac liked the young Frenchmen behind him, his elders in years, his inferiors in rank, birth and education. They were modern men-at-arms, very much like those who had followed his noble ancestors. Always, there had been de Marnacs serving France, whether kingdom, empire or republic. Serving the Cross, too: There was a de Marnac buried in an ancient castle perched high in the Taurus Mountains, on the road to Jerusalem. There had been three of the name in the Ninth Crusade.

Even at St. Cyr, on one of the large marble plaques in the chapel, gold letters scintillating against the smooth black surface, there appeared the name of Sertorius de Marnac, graduated from the school, fallen in the Crimea. Sertorius was one of Bernard de Marnac's many names, for names were not allowed to die in his family. The first Sertorius had been a friend of Montaigne.

Today, he felt proudly, was the turn of another de Marnac.

"THAT'S artillery, Lieutenant," Sergeant Crisal volunteered, bringing his horse forward until he was boot to boot with the young chief. "There must be

some hard fighting over in the east."

De Marnac refrained a smile, nodded. The sky was dripping tropical heat, but there were no storm clouds. So that the thunderous vibration must be the smashing of many batteries. Sergeant Crisal had pushed back the heavy helmet to wipe his sweaty face. He was twenty-four, the dean of the detachment, had served a year in Morocco, where he had seen actual fighting. So he posed as an expert, forgetting that fighting tribesmen armed with flintlocks and fighting the finely equipped German armies could not be compared.

"Yes, that is cannon fire, Sergeant," de Marnac said at last. He was mindful that an officer must not discourage the opinions of a subordinate unnecessarily. "Well, here we are at the appointed spot. On observation. Hope our three birds come back and bring their pals."

To hide his tenseness, he shook his feet free of the stirrups, sat at ease, relaxed. He produced a cigarette case, lighted up, passed the container to the sergeant, who took one and passed it on. The case was returned, emptied.

De Marnac smiled. The men did not like his mild tobacco very much. But they had been lured by the gold-tips, or were unwilling to refuse a courtesy. What big, simple kids they were! With the exception of Crisal, who intended to remain in the service, and of Lampoing, who studied draftsmanship at the *Arts et Métiers* School, they were farm lads, peasants. Big boys with the touching politeness and intense self-respect of their breed. French farm boys, the finest cavalrymen in the World. He was proud of them now, for they faced the ordeal of combat without fear, this afternoon in Eastern France, August 22nd. 1914.

German armies were uncoiling over French soil in this region; another avalanche in gray-green was crashing through Belgium. De Marnac felt a blind rage at the thought, a rage sprung from his stomach, which throbbed in his eyeball and temples: Invaders, Germans, Enemies! Not that he had any doubt of the ultimate outcome. He believed in France as he believed in the shining sun, as he believed in God.

His eyes swept the panorama before him. A gentle slope led to the main road, four hundred yards away. It was a recently harvested field, dotted with stacks of wheat-sheaves. Beyond that road were other fields, scattered clumps of trees, small woods A village in sight south-east was presumably held by French infantry. The nearest town was Longuyon.

That morning, reports had reached de Marnac's colonel that German cavalry had reached a village to the north, out of sight around a curve of the road. His platoon had been assigned to observation duty, to report the first appearance of the enemy.

Three of them had appeared, vanished. Suddenly, another horseman came in sight, without a lance, an officer. He raised his arms, something shimmered, blinked: field-glasses. After a long inspection, he gestured, trotted forward. After him appeared many men riding two abreast, long files bristling with lances.

When the detachment was in full sight, when no more riders appeared, de Marnac had counted sixty-two riders. German riders on the roads of France!

"Take this to the colonel," he said. He scribbled on a page torn from his notebook, his first war report: " 'Half-squadron enemy cavalry in view—' " and added map indications. As he signed his name, he grinned, aware that with this slip he had made his first active contribution to the war. A man took the slip, rode back through the wood, heading for headquarters, six or more miles south.

De Marnac knew that he was presumed to retire before such superior forces. But he had no actual order to do this. He pulled on the right glove, which he had discarded to write, smoothed it carefully, smiled. If these chaps came within striking distance without others showing up, he would attack them. Three to one? What of it?

Reports had drifted back already from Belgium that such odds were not too great for French cavalry. Frenchmen in the saddle were better than others. Probably because of atavism and tradi-

"Cowardly swine—Boches!"

tions even more than training, de Marnac felt.

"I intend to attack these lads, Crisal," he declared. "What do you think?"

"As my lieutenant orders," Crisal's stumpy mustache lifted to bare his big teeth.

Like de Marnac, he and the others were quivering with eagerness. But the officer knew that what would be gorgeous sport for him would mean even more for them. They were farmers, and those aliens were riding at ease over French farming country. As a matter of fact, two of his men were from this very region, Rossier, the gigantic chap who wore a plate made specially for his herculean chest, and a rather timid-looking youngster with blue eyes. For the moment, his name escaped de Marnac.

"Peleton, en bataille—"

De Marnac's voice was low and tense. The cavalrymen lined behind him. He heard the rasping of scabbards, turned his head quickly, glared. He had not given the order to bare the blades, and wanted his first engagement to be carried out with perfect discipline. The weapons sank back, the hasty men met his glare sheepishly.

"They must have spotted us, Lieutenant," Crisal volunteered. "It's strange that they don't—"

"Silence, Sergeant," de Marnac cut him short.

He wondered himself why the enemy had paid no attention to him. The sun gleaming on plates and helmets could not fail to attract notice. Yet the Germans trotted along the road, six hundred yards away, placid and calm. Overconfidence, de Marnac decided: Those chaps were scornful of their foes. Their officer probably had guessed that the *cuirassiers* were on observation, and did not believe they would dare attack against such superior numbers. He was parading by, expecting them to turn, to withdraw quietly.

Well, he would see. There was more than one way of doing things.

"Forward."

De Marnac lifted his right hand as he spoke, and the upfling of the white glove caused several faces to turn in his direction, lances to stir and bristle. The German officer, a lieutenant, turned in the saddle, the lances straightened, and the whole procession kept on trotting toward the south.

THE French platoon was a hundred yards down the incline before the others took the hostile manifestation seriously. The German dragoons halted, lances sank low.

"Draw sabers!" de Marnac cried.

His own blade slid from the scabbard, rose high and leveled impetuously toward the enemy.

"*Vive la France!* Charge!"

All his passionate elation fused into that shout. His mount leaped ahead, and behind him he heard the thudding of hoofs on the soft soil sprouting short straw bristles. The sun had come out, and de Marnac felt as if a great gust of cold wind had filled his lungs.

"Charge!"

The *cuirassiers* were charging in perfect array.

The shock was only a few seconds away, forty, thirty-five, thirty endless seconds. Each bound of the horses brought it nearer. He could discern the details of the uniforms, the lean, rugged mask of the officer, a man of twenty-five or six, with hard jaws and a thin mouth. De Marnac was sure that his platoon would catch these fools flat-footed, with the tremendous impetus of their charge behind them.

Then a harsh order resounded.

Something occurred which de Marnac could not believe: The detachment of dragoons, three times the strength of his own, was avoiding the clash! He had heard that this had happened in Belgium, but had not credited the rumor. But he had to believe his eyes: Traditions, the ancient repute of armored horsemen were clearing the path. . . .

"They're running, they're beating it!" several of his men cried.

"Cowardly swine—Boches!"

De Marnac, although his brain was flooded with excitement, had to concede one point: Afraid or not, these soldiers maneuvered superbly under stress, handled their mounts very well. There was no panic; perfect discipline prevailed as the dragoons pivoted smartly and galloped north.

Their officer, astride a large, bony beast, skirted the flank of his detachment further from the French to resume the lead. De Marnac could have sworn that he was smiling.

"Left—after them—"

The *Cuirassiers* had reached the road, the hoofs rolled on the harder surface. They had to check their headlong rush, to wheel and start in pursuit.

A hundred feet separated the young sub-lieutenant from the nearest dragoon. He shouted incoherently, insults, challenges, threats, his calm shattered. This was a sight worth seeing, sixty of the Kaiser's finest riders running before twenty horsemen of France.

The last man had replaced his lance into the socket; the cord was looped around his arm. He was turned in the saddle, carbine shouldered.

Even at the distance, de Marnac felt that he could see the small ring of tempered steel from which flame and lead would spurt. He seemed to be riding his horse into a deadly tunnel of metal. The weapon cracked out above the pounding of hoofs. There was a swift jerk of the man's wrist, and another shot.

The second missile passed close enough to be heard. De Marnac shivered with excitement rather than fear. He had heard, actually heard, his first hostile bullet! Some men had been deprived of that precious sound for years. He had received his baptism of fire.

His knees pressed hard, his hunter lengthened his strides, took a lead of five lengths on his men, who rode slower horses. He was an isolated figure between the two groups. But for nothing in the world would he have drawn rein or faltered. His followers would close the gap in a matter of seconds when the shock came, and moreover, he knew that it was not his destiny to be slain in his first encounter. That was a tradition in the family, too!

He gained another length, and it was the speed of his horse which saved him.

The German detachment had galloped around the curve of the road, and the *cuirassiers* hurtled after it furiously. Then it was that tragedy struck, so suddenly that de Marnac's ears were aching with the din, the hammering that appeared to pour out of space all about him, from all sides at once.

Tacktacktacktack—tacktacktacktack—tack!

A machine-gun. . . .

His platoon rode right into the discharges. De Marnac reined his horse, which reared and almost tossed him off. And his brain almost cracked under the strain of a hundred conflicting thoughts surging together. Before his eyes, his platoon, the men trusted to him, were melting under the blasts.

ON the right of the road was a small wood, such as the one he had left to attack. To reach it, there was a ditch to be crossed, a few bushes, then the undergrowth and the trees. It was from some hiding place within this wood that the gun was firing.

De Marnac now saw that he had been lured into ambush, as if a veil of foolish confidence wrapping his brain had been rent by the detonations. The dragoons had pretended flight, to permit automatic weapons to do the work for them without the least danger. De Marnac's horse was rearing, bewildered, furious at the brutal check.

The machine-gun was still playing; lead pattered on the armors, pitifully inadequate, battering in helmets, piercing steel plates. Horses reared, plunged, rolled on the road, neighing screamingly, kicking. Here and there, men sprawled among them, or darted from side to side, dodging the flying hoofs, hands high as if to shield their heads from hurt.

Sergeant Crisal was still in the saddle. But the lower part of his face had been shot away. Blood drenched his metal protected breast; there was a look of anguished, fierce bewilderment, of fury and agony, in his dying eyes. Lampoing would never become a master draftsman. De Marnac had a fleeting vision of his face, staring up from the dust of the road, and knew that he was dead. Dead—

They were killing men, killing his men!

The machine-gun fired again.

The sub-lieutenant felt impacts against his leg; his knee was numbed. It was only a few seconds since that hellish weapon had opened fire, but that space stretched like centuries. De Marnac felt as if his whole past existence had been wiped out, as if he had always existed in this turmoil of whining lead, dripping blood, screams and death. He tried to think, to think for them all—and he could not think—where could he go, what should he do?

There was the open road; there were the open fields, where the bullets would follow his men, where they could be overhauled and hacked to pieces by the dragoons. For the dragoons were returning—he could hear the ominous pounding of the hoofs, the coming of the well-timed counter-charge launched to crush the survivors.

What? Where? How?

"This way, Lieutenant."

A man was at his side. It was the timid private born in this region, the man whom he had scarcely noticed, whose name he had been unable to recall. A plain fellow—Faivre. He was transfigured, his jaws set hard, his placid blue eyes suddenly ablaze with resolution, courage and will.

"Where?"

Faivre indicated the wood, some distance away from the machine-gun's emplacement.

Thus prompted, the sub-lieutenant understood: That was the only lane to safety. The weapon could be shifted to bear on the spot, but the bullets could not penetrate the tangle of trees and brush; the counter-charge would be impeded, slowed down. It offered momentary salvation.

"Follow me—come on, come on!"

He jumped his horse across the ditch, crashed through the bushes. In a few seconds, he and the survivors were off the road, fighting off pursuers with carbines and revolvers. Sergeant Crisal was gone, Corporal Lampoing was gone, but Faivre had taken over the duties of second in command without being asked.

He rode his big bay close to de Marnac.

"We'd better scram out of this, Lieutenant," he advised in his deliberate peasant's voice. "They'll be on us like flies on fresh tripe otherwise. I know the paths better than those swine do. Bor a couple of miles down the way."

"Take the lead," de Marnac agreed.

He drew his horse aside to allow the privates to file by, for as long as he had proved useless as a leader, his indicated position was that of greatest danger. He counted them as they passed him, mechanically. Eight! Eight left out of nineteen! His rashness had cost eleven lives. It was a splendid debut for a man with military academy training!

Gray silhouettes showed between the trees for a while; shots were exchanged. Then a trumpet blew a string of silvery notes. De Marnac knew that call—one of the few things he had learned, he thought grimly. It was 'Retreat'.

The dragoons were abandoning the chase, probably because their minds were filled with old tales of *francs-tireurs,* of partisan warfare in France, and they dreaded ambush. No one could reproach the thin-faced German lieutenant with not knowing his trade. So far, he had contrived to kill without being killed, which is the very essence of war.

FAIVRE was an excellent guide.

For many minutes, the survivors of the platoon progressed under the trees, on soft, narrow trails. Those in the lead would reach out from the saddles to slash wire fences dividing the woods into parcels. The wires strummed like guitar strings as they parted under the sabers' edge.

De Marnac was still breathless and confused. But his men seemed nerveless. As they rode, they talked of the engagement, of the massacre. This one had been killed, surely. That other wounded. Those who had been dismounted and had caught horses made much of the exploit. They speculated on which men would be taken prisoners, how long they would be held captives.

"Dirty five minutes," one of them summed it up heartily.

De Marnac envied them. He remembered that he had felt impacts, looked down, fearing to see blood dripping to the dust. But he had been fortunate. The heel of his left boot had been knocked off, his scabbard was badly battered. There were two long ridges on his hunter's flank, oozing bright red, leaving dark, moist patches below on the soft hair near the belly. These wounds were on the surface, not at all serious.

De Marnac reloaded his revolver, and wondered whether it would not be preferable to kill himself, rather than to report what he had done. It stung him to know that the Germans must be laughing at the success of their trick. And laugh they must, for it had been so ludicrously simple.

He understood what had happened. And he was most humiliated because he had to blame his pride, not his ignorance. He recalled clearly that he had been warned. A machine-gun instructor had lectured at the academy, warning the future cavalrymen of what they would be called upon to face in the coming war.

For years, that instructor had explained, the Germans had been developing a system of cavalry scouting backed by extremely mobile forces, mounted on horses or bicycles, provided with quick-firing weapons. They were instructing their young officers not to be too eager to fight with the cold steel, but to lure their foes into the *verschleirung,* or screen of machine-guns.

A wise and a practical people, the Germans. They loved their military traditions, but did not follow them foolishly. They had preserved their handsome trappings, spike-helmets, sabers, lances, but they did not rely on them. Green-gray cloth covered helmets and fine uniforms, machine-guns backed old weapons. What short work a handful of gunners had made of twenty strapping men-at-arms, despite their brass helmets, forged plates and fine feathers. Eleven dead! Eleven dead here, eleven dead there, and thousands would pile, thousands in brilliant plumes and scarlet trousers!

All was quiet in the woods now; birds whistled as usual. But there was a continuous vibration of cannon in the air. De Marnac thought bitterly that if the French artillery was as burdened with magnificent traditions as was the cavalry, they were due for a sound licking.

The ghastly disasters of Sedan and Metz had taught them nothing, evidently. For forty-four years, Frenchmen had been howling that they had been sur-

prised by superior armament, more modern methods, had seemed to think that the enemy had taken unfair advantage. As if a major war were a tournament, a sporting event with a fine code of behavior and a possibility to call out fouls!

And he, de Marnac, had been one of those fools.

Faivre drew rein and waited for him.

"What now, Lieutenant?" he asked respectfully.

"Lost your way?"

"No, Lieutenant. But the woods end a few hundred yards from here, and we'll have to leave cover. The village of St. Laurent is not so far down the road. There must be some of our infantry there."

He scanned their faces avidly. No, they did not appear to blame him for what had happened, although he was their chief and had led them into a trap. His amazement increased that they had recovered faster than he had, were accepting the facts of war quietly, with philosophy.

"Let's go, friends," he said.

They swung back toward the main road. Another wire fence had to be cut. Then they forded the ditch and rode on the highway. Their mounts were still fresh, and the French outposts could not be remote. De Marnac would soon be safe—safe to report his stupidity.

"Trot!"

For several minutes the group progressed at a good pace, to the cadence of the hoofs, and the rhythmical, familiar clicking of equipment

Eleven killed, eleven killed, eleven killed, the hoofs seemed to beat out, white gloves, white gloves, eleven killed. The young officer automatically glanced at his hands. Somehow, somewhere, the glazed white leather had touched blood, very probably when he had tried to steady Crisal in the saddle, when the sergeant was reeling, with his mangled face dripping red. White gloves, eleven killed, bloody gloves—

"*Sacrebleu!*" a private exclaimed quietly.

German dragoons had appeared again, barring the way to the French line, the same tall, sinister gray silhouettes. De Marnac counted over a dozen lances. Then he recognized the officer who had lured him into ambush.

His presence in the roadway puzzled de Marnac until he realized that the officer, upon wisely giving up direct pursuit through the woods, had simply consulted his map and marked the probable spots where the fugitive French might emerge into the open. He had had to split his detachment to assign guards to each possible exit, and had naturally reserved the most likely spot for himself.

The French sub-lieutenant saw that he had misjudged his enemies in every way. They were very confident, those gray riders, and although the odds in their favor were much less than they had been before, they made no effort to avoid combat, now that no trick could be played.

"Fourteen, and the officer, fifteen," de Marnac counted.

Nine against fifteen, that was all. Yet some of the brilliant faith of de Marnac had gone, and he glanced right and left. There was no way out.

To turn around and go back into the woods meant certain capture when the German infantry columns arrived. To take to the fields meant a desultory, scattered combat on soft soil. And to turn tail probably would bring the *cuirassiers* to another detachment of dragoons as numerous as this one.

This time, he did not turn chidingly when the men drew sabers without orders. His blade pointed forward and he called his orders.

"Through them. Rallying point the next road curve. Ready—charge!"

Long training asserted itself; the small band of survivors obeyed perfectly, charging in fine order, straight at the threatening lances.

IT seemed to de Marnac that he had barely time to lower his sword when the German officer was hurtling upon him. The dragoon was up on the stirrups, body half-twisted as he drew back his heavy blade for a mighty swing.

Time after time, for years, de Marnac had heard saber instructors repeat: "The typical French blow is the thrust, which relies on skill more than on strength

The thrust invariably beats the swing, as a straight line is the shortest distance between two points."

He leaned forward, lying on the outstretched neck of his galloping horse, arm, forearm, wrist, hand and blade forming a rigid, straight line. The steel point sped true, struck a button, was deflected and jabbed harmlessly by the target.

De Marnac felt as if his brains had been knocked out as the swinging saber smashed through the side of his shako, shearing the leather peak, breaking through, only to be wrenched sideways to strike the skull with the flat instead of the edge. The strength of the blow tore at the headgear, snapped the chin-strap, which jerked de Marnac's head upward with incredible violence, half-strangling him, tearing at his lips and nose. Lights flashed, crackled before his eyes.

When he could see again, the dragoon was grinning, twisting his torso back for another such formidable swing. He knew how to handle the weapon, would not miss. And this time, there would be nothing to deflect the blow.

De Marnac forgot all training.

There was no time to thrust or swing. He recovered his weapon, shoved his arm upward, in a clumsy stroke delivered somewhat like an uppercut in boxing. No swordsman would have claimed that blow; it was awkward, unacademic.

But it caught the German in the face, and before de Marnac's bewildered glance, that face was gashed open from chin to eye, a red veil flashed down to cover the lean jaws. Then the hilt-guard of the weapon, following up, struck the German lieutenant on the chin, lifting him out of the saddle.

So far so good—

De Marnac ducked low as a lance passed over his shoulder, whirled his horse about. All around him, there was a scuffling uproar, panting, a continuous thumping of steel on iron. The breastplates and helmets were of service now. The *cuirassiers* had dodged or parried the lances, had gone in close, where they had the advantage. The dragoons were dropping the long weapons for saber and pistol.

De Marnac saw a gray back, crossed by a broad belt, and dug his blade into it. The weight of the man's body dragged him sideways, the sword strap broke or slipped from his wrist. He groped for his revolver.

The iron-shod butt of a lance struck him in the chest; he was hurled from the saddle. He landed heavily, scrambled to his feet, darted out of the mêlée to run after his horse. His boot, minus a heel, caused him to trip at the third stride; he fell headlong. As he rolled over to rise, there was a ringing impact nearby: A dragoon had missed him with a lusty lance stab. He dove for the ditch.

The horses pounded on the road; the weapons clashed, men shouted. Everything moved too fast to be clearly discerned, and de Marnac hovered uncertainly, dodging here and there, like a man trying to board a train already moving too rapidly to be caught.

"This way, Lieutenant—"

It was Faivre again, mounted, leading de Marnac's horse. The private was flushed, sweaty, flecked with blood. But judging from his expression, he was very happy. He helped the officer into the saddle.

"Let's go, Lieutenant. Those that can run are in the clear."

This was the truth. Five men were galloping away, and the dragoons, having paid for two men with seven, were somewhat irresolute. But de Marnac knew they would not remain so very long. Moreover, in the distance, another platoon of lancers was coming.

DE MARNAC and Faivre overhauled their comrades at the curve.

The officer saw that there were two of the five who could not carry on much longer. The dismounted dragoons were firing at them with carbines. As the flight was resumed, one of the wounded pitched forward, arms tossing up and down with the strides of his horse A comrade reached out to steady him, but too late. The poor chap smashed to the roadway.

Fourteen gone out of nineteen—

"Just a little further, Lieutenant—"

Faivre was right. A moment later, a

section of *chasseurs* on bicycles appeared on the road. When they saw the fleeing men and their pursuers, they dismounted and scattered in the fields flanking the highway, firing as they moved. Three hundred yards on, the *cuirassiers* met a column of line infantry moving north, plodding along in blue greatcoats and scarlet trousers.

"The ambulance?" de Marnac asked of a lean, bearded captain.

"Leave your man here. I'll see that he's taken back on a stretcher." The infantryman looked up at de Marnac. "You seem to be badly knocked about yourself, old man."

"Had a pretty bad time, yes. See any *cuirassiers* about? I must join my regiment."

"The cavalry?" The other smiled. "Must be somewhere behind us. Nothing happens as expected in this crazy war."

"If you manage to walk up the road a bit," de Marnac retorted, "You'll find fourteen cavalrymen who were ahead of you."

"No offense meant." The captain shrugged. "There's a staff captain handling traffic in the village who'll probably know where your outfit is located. Good luck."

De Marnac led his four dusty, blood-stained riders into the main street. Infantrymen had commandeered a barrel of beer, and were willing to share their find with the returning cavalry. The staff captain consulted notes, gave them vague directions, and they plodded through roads crowded with troops.

"Let's cut through the fields," de Marnac said.

As he rode, he thought over the report he must make. And Faivre stood out as the real commander. In all justice, this must be said. He must be rewarded. But what would he get? A medal, and a corporal's chevrons. Yet there was more calm, more military sense in him than in the majority of officers. De Marnac was revising his beliefs in blood, traditions and training. He had all those great qualities, but he had not been the best man on the field.

Then the big private, Rossier, rode up to de Marnac, held out something battered, dusty, crusted with drying blood,

The German officer was hurtling on him.

from which drooped sodden, stained feathers. It was some seconds before the young officer recognized his shako.

"Where did you get it?" he asked foolishly.

"Thought you might want it for a souvenir, Lieutenant. So I picked it up."

Rossier said this simply. He had picked it up, that was all. Picked up between the flying hoofs of frightened horses, with lances and sabers stabbing about. It was ridiculous and it was sublime.

De Marnac had to make an effort to recall what that shako had meant to him, all the stupid ideals of glory, of superiority, of parade. Faivre, Rossier, and the others, farmers, plowboys, peasants, but better, cooler men than he.

"Keep it for yourself, Rossier."

"No kidding, Lieutenant?" the man beamed with pleasure. "Say, my folks will go nuts over it!"

"It's all yours," de Marnac assured him.

He felt that he had learned the one lesson combat could teach an officer: Respect of his men, humility before the humble. The day had not been wasted. He looked down at the white gloves, tore them off and threw them into the nearest ditch.

Frank felt Millis go limp under him.

SPY OF THE NORTH

By LUKE SHORT

WHEN FRANK NEARING, prospector and trapper, came to Lobstick to meet the incoming mail plane, it was ostensibly to welcome a new partner from the outside. Actually, however,

LUTE WESTOCK was a total stranger, a man whom Nearing had agreed to hide in his cabin for two thousand dollars and no questions asked. Nearing had been assured that the man was not a criminal, and he needed ready money

desperately enough not to ask any questions about the strange set-up. However,

CORPORAL MILLIS, in charge of the district, had privately determined to check into the new trapper's actions.

BRUCE McIVOR, who had arrived on the same plane, had been selling strychnine illegally to trappers. Caught by Nearing, he was temporarily saved by

KELCY McIVOR, his sister, who boldly admitted her brother's guilt, but threatened to disclose Nearing's secret deal with Westock if he talked.

SAUL CHENARD, Lobstick trader, had been the cause of young McIvor's acts. Through

BONNIE, a dance hall girl, Saul was supplying Bruce with the drug and taking a share of the profits. Saul determined to run Nearing out of the country. With that in view he sent one of his men to wreck the new-comer's trap lines. However,

CHARLIE, Nearing's Cree helper, caught Saul's man and came back to the cabin just as Nearing was telling Westock the reason for his strange behavior. Because the cabin at Wailing River was no trapper's shack. It masked an abandoned gold claim—a claim which Nearing had reopened, striking rich ore. But under the law a claim had to be abandoned for three years before a new staker could file. And there was still a month to go before the time limit would expire. It was vitally necessary, in the meanwhile, that he keep his secret from the world.

Bruce learned through a letter which he had intercepted that Nearing had filed a claim. He confronted the trapper with the letter and tried to blackmail him into silence, also demanding a cut in the deal. Desperate, Frank, with Westock, took Bruce out on the trail, leaving him provisions enough to reach a trapper's cabin some days distant, but so far from Lobstick that it would be impossible for him to reveal the secret until Frank's claim was properly filed.

But Lute Westock, for the first time revealing his real menace, had another idea. Unknown to Nearing, he filled McIvor's sugar tin with strychnine, knowing that the boy would die before he ever reached the trader's camp.

Weeks later, in Lobstock, Nearing was questioned by Millis about McIvor's disappearance. Believing that the boy was on his way back, he told Kelcy what he had done. After all, Bruce would not dare to talk about the mine, he reasoned, not with the mail robbery charge hanging over him. But he'd be back where liquor and friends might pry it out of him, and that was bad.

And all the time, unknown to himself, he was building up a case against himself that was more serious, more important than even the gold he was trying to save. Because somewhere on the Wailing River trail a dead man was waiting. And when he should be found, Nearing stood practically convicted of his murder, by circumstantial evidence—and by his own lips. Lute Westock had played his cards just right. Now he waited to see the outcome.

Under Millis' probing, Nearing admitted leaving the boy out on the trail. Suspicious, the officer had a plane chartered to make the trip to the cabin where Bruce was supposed to be.

To Nearing's dismay and surprise, he had not appeared there. A search by plane discovered his body—with the plain marks of strychnine poisoning on his face!

They pulled back into Lobstick with the body, and Nearing was mobbed by Saul's men, being rescued only after a pitched battle. It was enough for Millis.

Lacking direct proof, but with the full circumstantial evidence pointing to Nearing, he took him into custody. The murder net had tightened—and this time there seemed no way out.

AFTER supper that night Lute stepped into Millis' office, and hesitated inside.

"Come in," Millis said testily. "This is a public office."

"I'd like to see Frank if I can," Lute said.

Millis pointed toward a door in the side wall. "There's a back stairs in that hall. Back bedroom."

Lute thanked him and went on up. He found Frank in a small, sparsely furnished room under the eaves. It was a girl's room, papered with a gay flower design, its curtains of chintz, and on the

low dressing table against the wall was an oversize teddy bear with a blue ribbon on its throat.

Lute stepped into the room, looked about him, and grinned. Frank was half sitting, half lying on the bed, his shirt off, his underwear top dirty and torn.

"Nice place," Lute remarked. "A little floozy for my taste, but good enough if you like that style."

Frank grinned sheepishly. "Millis has got a daughter outside at school. Guess what I wore at dinner tonight."

"I couldn't."

"A shirt with a boiled front and no collar. It's all Millis had."

Lute laughed. "I'll bring you some clothes tomorrow." He sank upon a rickety chair. "Can you go out?"

"After dark, Millis says."

Again Lute grinned at the picture of Frank in this room, and Frank rolled a smoke. They talked of the fight and Lute reported that Charlie had a badly wrenched knee. His own left eye was swelled almost shut and was taking on a rich red color.

Presently he pulled out an opened letter, and handed it to Frank. "This was what I was going to show you this afternoon when the trouble started. It came in the mail while you were away."

Frank took the letter out and opened it.

> Dear Lute: Phillips sent this word in today by a messenger. In his last mail received at the Force Lake camp there's a letter from Jean's lawyer saying he'll be hauled into court when he returns. They've traced his connection with you, and he'll have to tell your whereabouts or take a stiff fine. I suggest you clear out of there in a hurry. Joe is coming down week after next, so you'd better make it by then. Regards and luck,
>
> Carl.

Frank read it twice and looked up at Lute.

"Jean's my former wife," Lute said.

"And Carl?"

"My lawyer. I met Joe through him."

Frank folded the letter slowly and murmured, "Want your money back, Lute?"

Lute shook his head. "No. But I wondered if you wanted the other thousand I promised you."

"Do you need it?"

Lute nodded. "That's all I brought along, that thousand and some pocket money. Now that I've got to move, I'll need it to get settled somewhere else. I can write to my partner, but it's dangerous." He paused. "You'll get the money. You've kept your word. And of course, you don't have to agree to this; nobody's making you."

Frank smiled faintly. "In some ways you're a kid, Lute. What's to stop me right now from demanding ten thousand dollars from you? Would you pay it, rather than face your wife?"

Lute looked disturbed. "Why, yes, I suppose."

Frank grinned, then. "Well, I'm not doing it. And you pay off that other thousand when it's safe to get it."

"Thanks," Lute said.

"When will you go?"

"Next plane, I think. After that, it wouldn't be safe to stay."

Frank was watching him curiously, and said suddenly, "I misjudged you, Lute. I thought that alimony story was a gag."

"I know you did," Lute said, and he grinned too. He rose and Frank handed him his letter.

"We've been over some jumps," Frank said thoughtfully. "I've been a pretty tough cookie at times, Lute. I guess you know why."

Lute nodded and smiled. "All is forgiven."

"Going up to the shack?"

Lute nodded. "After the funeral tomorrow I'll go and get my things. That is, if I can borrow the dogs. It'll have to be a fast trip, too."

"You're welcome to them," Frank said.

Lute picked up his cap. "I'll bring your clothes over tomorrow, Frank. Sweet dreams."

He went out. Downstairs, he bid a polite good night to Millis. Outside he headed for the hotel. He was smiling in the dark. Frank had swallowed it, bait, hook, line, sinker, and with not a flicker of suspicion.

If Millis was going to send the strych-

nine—no, flour—out for analysis, it would go on the next plane. And on that same plane he would fly out. By the time the hue and cry was raised after him, he would be hidden, away from this trap. That letter, which he had spent the supper hour composing in his room, had done the trick. Frank hadn't looked at the smeared postmark on the envelope, which was the envelope of the letter Bruce had opened.

All in all, he considered himself in luck. There was one more job that might be necessary, but that would be as easy as the others. He was a little annoyed that they'd found Bruce. He hadn't counted on that, but he was taking care of it.

CHAPTER XIV

COUNTER ATTACK

SAUL was one of the first to fade out of the hotel lobby at Millis' entrance. He had courage, but it was tempered with discretion, and his recipe for survival included the belief that only fools argue with policemen. Besides, Frank was taken care of. Saul had seen him go down in that fighting, kicking mob, and he considered the score even.

He was holding a handkerchief to the mashed corner of his mouth as he came into the restaurant, Bonnie trailing after him. Like everybody else within a radius of two hundred yards of the hotel, she had heard the racket and had watched part of the fight.

Upstairs, she said, "Sit down, Saul, and let me look at it."

"It's nothing," Saul replied. All the same, he sat on the edge of the bed in her room and let her look at it, and then make a fuss over him. The skin on his cheek was torn where Frank's fist had raked along his face, and three of his teeth had been loosened. But he felt a quiet exhilaration as he told Bonnie what had happened over there.

When she was finished, he stood up and regarded himself in the mirror. A small strip of tape at the corner of his mouth hid the mark. Afterwards, he rolled up his sleeves and poured some water into the crockery wash bowl.

Bonnie, sitting on the bed, said, "All the same, Saul, you were taking a chance."

"Why? I was Bruce's closest friend. That's where I belonged, in the front of the fight."

Bonnie said flatly, "You didn't belong in it at all. Bruce is dead. We're safe. Stay out of the whole mess from now on."

Saul soaped his hands and spoke reasonably. "How would that look? Me, his best friend, sitting back and doing nothing."

"It would look like sense to me," Bonnie said tartly. "What does it matter what anybody thinks, anyway? You got all you could out of Bruce. Now, forget him, and stay out of it."

Saul turned slowly, "Out of what?"

"You know what I mean. There'll be hell raised around here over Frank Nearing. People will talk and sign petitions and make threats. Every time you go in a store the hot stove wise-guys will give you some inside dope on who killed Bruce." She smiled tolerantly. "I know you, Saul. You'll turn into the Voice of the People. Sooner or later you'll rub up against Millis, and if you get him mad enough he'll start wondering about you. And then it'll be too late."

Saul rinsed his hands and took down the towel. Bonnie's jibe had been just close enough to home to bring the color into his face. He said sarcastically, "What would I do without you, Puss?"

"Swell up and bust," Bonnie said calmly.

"Tell me more," Saul said drily.

"All right, I will. I'll tell you what to do. Whenever the funeral is, you show up at it. Tell the duchess and her old man that it was a terrible thing, that they have your sympathy, then come back here and drink a quart of whiskey and stay in bed for a week. When anybody asks you about it, just say, 'We all have to die sometime' and turn over and sleep. How's that?"

"Lousy," Saul said quietly, and went on, "Now I'll tell you what I'm *going* to do. The other night when Nearing jumped me and took me up to his room, he got way out of bounds. He was even out of bounds when he jumped Joe McKenzie and took that stuff. I'll not forget this." He smiled crookedly. "He's

stuck his head out this time. I'll knock it off for him."

Then was alarm in Bonnie's voice as she asked, "What are you going to do, Saul?"

"See him hang," Saul said briefly.

"Saul, if you do you're—"

"Quiet, Puss," Saul said mildly. He went into his room across the hall and took off his shirt and Bonnie followed him, her dark eyes sombre and angry. She sat on his bed and watched him put on a clean flannel shirt.

She said suddenly in a bitter voice, "I'll say it again, Saul. Let's get out of here. Now!"

"No."

"But Bruce is dead! You'll never find another sucker like him! We've got money, and we're in the clear! Why don't we go?"

"No."

Bonnie said scathingly, "Do you know what I've got a notion to do, Saul? I think I'll wait outside your room tonight and shoot through the window at you."

Saul turned slowly to look at her, his hands arrested in the act of tying his tie.

"Maybe you'd get what I'm trying to tell you, then!" Bonnie said bitterly. "Saul, I've been shot at! I'm scared! I want to get out of here!"

Saul laughed and turned to the mirror. "You weren't shot at. You're scared of your shadow. Besides that, I'm staying." He hesitated and said calmly, "You can go if you want, though."

Real panic mounted into Bonnie's eyes for a moment, but she sat motionless. The quick rise and fall of her breast was the only sign of her agitation. Then she said baldly, "You want me out of here so you can make a pass at the Duchess, eh?"

Saul said wearily, "Yeah. Sure."

"What are you dressing up for?"

"My shirt was torn."

"Where are you going?"

Saul finished tying his tie, patted it, and then turned to face Bonnie. "Puss, I'm going to take a drink, maybe two, right here. Then I'll eat supper and come up here and put on my coat. You'll follow me and ask me where I'm going. Then I'll tell you I'm going over to pay my respects to Kelcy McIvor and her father. You'll yell your head off, but that won't stop me. Understand, it won't stop me. And I'll probably hit you to shut you up." He smiled, without humor. "Would you rather get hit now, or after supper? It doesn't matter to me when I do it."

McIVOR'S house lay right behind the store, facing the back street. It was a two-story affair of logs with a neat picket fence around it. When Saul entered the gate that night he could look through the window and see Mr. McIvor in conversation with a pair of townspeople. Nevertheless, Saul knocked on the door.

Kelcy answered it, and when she saw Saul her face lost a little of its gravity. She led him back through the hall into the kitchen, which was warm and dimly lighted from the lamp in a wall bracket by the big black stove.

Saul took the chair Kelcy offered, and waited until she sat down across the table from him.

"Is there any way I can help, Kelcy?" he asked.

Kelcy shook her head.

"If you could only go in and help me talk to these people who are coming in," she said tonelessly. "Oh, they're kind and they mean well. But they hated him when he was alive. Now they pretend they didn't. None of them knew the lovable side of him—like we did."

Saul smiled sadly. "No. They were afraid of that wild streak. And it was what I liked in him, his spirit." Then he said, "But maybe you'd rather not talk about it, Kelcy."

"I don't mind, to you. But I won't talk about it to people who hint around nastily that it was murder and scandal."

Saul's face was grave. He said levelly, "Then you'd better not talk to me, Kelcy. Because I think it was murder."

"Saul!" Kelcy stared at him intently. "I see," she said softly. "That explains the bandage. You were in that mob?"

"Led it," Saul corrected. "I'm not ashamed of it, either, Kelcy. If I can stir up enough trouble to get Millis to use the information I have, I'll be content to take the blame."

"What information?"

"You tell me first about your finding

Bruce, if you don't mind. Then I'll tell you what I know."

Kelcy told him all she knew, even about the conversation with Frank when they brought in Bruce's body. "If it was murder, would Frank Nearing have taken us to Horn Lake and helped search for Bruce? And if he was guilty, wouldn't he have told about Bruce's strychnine peddling? He didn't, Saul. At this very moment, Millis doesn't know where the strychnine came from."

Saul said in a voice edged with anger, "Why should he? If Nearing had betrayed that, wouldn't you have told Millis about that first day you met him? And he doesn't want that above everything."

"Why? Do you know anything about Frank Nearing?"

"Nothing. It's a hunch. Why would he have blackmailed you, then, into keeping away from Millis?"

"I don't know," Kelcy faltered, and then her voice firmed. "But I don't think that was why he kept quiet. It was—well, a kind of consideration for me, maybe."

"Wait." Saul folded his arms on the table top and said calmly: "For murder, you've got to have a motive, don't you?"

"Yes, and there is none. Why would Frank Nearing kill Bruce? Because he thought I'd told Bruce that I overheard something that first day in the hotel room? Nonsense! I didn't hear anything. That's too flimsy. Don't you see, if Frank Nearing killed Bruce over that, he'd have to know what I overheard? And then he'd have to kill me too."

Saul smiled agreement. "All right, that's out. No motive there. But how do you like this Bruce went up to Wailing River with a letter of Nearing's, a letter that came in the mail and that Bruce opened."

"Saul!"

"I'm telling the truth," Saul said earnestly. "Bonnie saw him steam the letter open over a tea kettle on your storeroom stove."

KELCY sat transfixed, and Saul went on gently. "Bonnie doesn't know what was in the letter. She refused to read it, and tried to keep Bruce from opening it. But whatever was in that letter was so important, so secret, that Bruce thought he could go straight up to Nearing and blackmail him with it. Bruce probably said something like this: 'Give me that strychnine you've got, and if you ever say a word about my bringing it in, about my peddling it, I'll tell Millis what I read in that letter' and it will be too bad."

Saul leaned back in his chair. "Does that supply a motive? Nearing was afraid of what Bruce knew. He had to get him out of the way. He took him over to the height of land, left him poisoned food, and came back. If Bruce was discovered, nobody could prove Nearing poisoned him. He planted the bottle on Bruce to make it look like suicide. Nobody could supply a motive. And you're helping Nearing. Don't you see, Kelcy?"

Kelcy was silent for a full minute. Her eyes were clouded.

"That's what Frank was trying to keep Bonnie from telling that day up in the hotel," she mused.

Saul said nothing, watching her. Kelcy shuddered suddenly and said. "It can't be, Saul! It just can't be!"

"It can! It is!"

"But he doesn't look like a killer!" she exclaimed.

"They never do. Ask Millis. Look at the pictures of murderers."

Kelcy straightened her back, and looked miserably at Saul. "Are you going to tell Millis?"

"It's not my brother," Saul said in a kindly voice. "It's up to you, Kelcy. I'm human enough to want to see Bruce's murderer punished. But to see justice done, Bruce's name will have to be dragged through slime and muck. And I won't do that, Kelcy. I have no right to do it. It's up to you. Would you rather see a clever killer on the loose than tell Millis about Bruce stealing the letter? It's your choice."

Kelcy's face was gray, and she was trembling. Suddenly, she put her face in her hands, and Saul came to his feet. But Kelcy wasn't crying. Saul watched impersonally while she suffered the agony of that choice, his eyes curious and probing and sly. Kelcy's hands came down on the table and she stared at the

worn pattern of oilcloth for so long that Saul thought he was dismissed. He moved his feet, and the noise of it lifted Kelcy's glance to him.

"I'll do it, Saul," she said in a dull voice. "I—guess I'm human enough to want to see Bruce's killer punished, too. Only, can't I wait? Can't I let him be buried in peace, without people knowing he was a common thief?"

Saul said gently, "Of course, Kelcy."

"And you'll come with me to Millis after the funeral?"

"Gladly." Saul hesitated. "I'd hold just one thing back from Millis, Kelcy I wouldn't tell him about the strychnine, or where it came from. I wouldn't for two reasons. There's no use smearing Bruce any more than you have to. The opening of those letters will be all Millis wants. The other reason is Joe McKenzie. That poor devil has suffered agonies with that leg. Why punish him more?"

Kelcy said she wouldn't, and got unsteadily to her feet. And then the tears came in spite of her. It was the second time, and she couldn't help it. She buried her face in her hands, and then she felt Saul's hands on her shoulders as he drew her to him.

"Oh, Saul, it's so damned, damned rotten!" She choked the words out against Saul's chest.

"You're—the only friend I have in the world, Saul—the only one!"

"Hush," Saul murmured. "Everybody loves you. Not as much as I do, maybe, but they do."

And Kelcy heard his declaration of love for her, and it didn't seem strange because she needed it so badly.

CHAPTER XV

THE DEAD ARE SILENT

THE day after the evening Saul had gone to see Kelcy, Bonnie knew she had lost him. Nothing was said, nothing was done, but she knew. They had fought a hundred times before, but the fights always had a pattern. There would be hot words, maybe blows, and sometimes for days afterwards they would snarl at each other and think up cruel little ways to get even. But there always came a time eventually when Saul would swear and then laugh sheepishly, or Bonnie would come out of her sulk and kiss him, and the storm would be over.

This time, there was no storm.

Saul was polite and friendly to her, but she couldn't get into his mind. When she had cursed him that morning, he laughed at her. When she pleaded with him, he didn't answer her. He had the contained, satisfied manner of a man who has just settled a question in his mind, and who is experiencing the blessed relief of dearly purchased conviction. The Duchess, with her blonde good looks, her smile, her aloofness had won. Soon, Bonnie knew, Saul would tell her about his new love, thinking it was news to her. And Bonnie would go.

The thing to do, Bonnie decided, was get away from him. Move over to the other hotel, and make him miss her. When he got tired of talking sweet nothings to that icicle and holding hands in the parlor, he would come back to her. But she knew he wouldn't, and yet she was going to put up the fight.

Saul was gone all morning. Bonnie moved her clothes over to the other hotel while he was absent. He came in to change his clothes at noon, and did not even remark on the emptiness of her room. He left, dressed in a black suit, and bid her a formal good day. He was going to the funeral that afternoon.

Bonnie remembered the night she had gone to the dance to watch Saul and Kelcy, unable to resist turning the knife in the wound. She was still unable to resist it, she thought bitterly, as she went up the stairs to change into a black dress and coat. There was nothing like watching your man make love to another woman at a funeral.

Bonnie didn't attend the services in the little frame church, but when the funeral procession filed out onto the newly shoveled path that led from the vestry to the graveyard next to the church, Bonnie slipped unobtrusively into the crowd. She saw Lute and Millis, dressed in sober black, with Frank Nearing. And Kelcy was between Saul and her father.

A light snow was falling from an overcast sky, and the new earth from the

grave was powdered lightly. The edges of the hole were jagged, and where the picks and crowbars had dug into the frozen earth, they had left polished black marks rimed with ground frost.

The services here were short, and Bonnie paid no attention to them, instead watching Saul and Kelcy. Mr. McIvor and Kelcy were dry-eyed through it all; Saul wore a suitably grave expression that made Bonnie's lip lift in a silent sneer. He had used that poor fool of a Bruce McIvor, lied to him and cheated him and framed him, and now he was pretending a well-mannered grief. Bonnie hated him at that moment as she had hated nothing in her life.

After the services, Saul and Kelcy stepped over to speak to Millis, and Bonnie turned away. She was almost out of the gate of the cemetery when she heard Saul calling: "Bonnie. Bonnie."

She stepped off the path to wait for them, for Kelcy was on Saul's arm. She nodded to Nearing, Lute and Millis as they passed her, feeling uncomfortable under the brief stare of Nearing's deep-set eyes, and then forgot them.

Her handsome face was sullen and hostile when Saul and Kelcy stopped in front of her. Kelcy spoke, but Bonnie didn't.

"Can you come over to Millis' office with us, Bonnie?" Saul asked.

"What for?"

"Kelcy is going to tell Millis about Bruce and those letters he opened. They give Nearing a motive for Bruce's murder and she wants you to corroborate the story."

"Oh, so you told her that?" Bonnie asked.

"Of course," Saul said easily. But there was no ease in his eyes, Bonnie saw. He had that alert, bland look of gall on his face that he wore whenever he faced a crisis of any sort. And that crisis Bonnie well understood. Suppose she were to blurt out now Saul's connection with Bruce and name him as the liar he was? That look on Saul's face was the warning, and Bonnie heeded it sullenly. Her hatred for Saul did not conquer either her good sense or her fear. One word about Saul's business and he would kill her, and Bonnie knew it. But there were other ways.

She smiled crookedly, looking at Kelcy, and said then roughly, "Both of you can go to hell. I don't know anything about any letters."

"I think you'll remember when Millis hauls you up before him this afternoon and makes you tell him," Saul pointed out.

"Well, he'll have to make me," Bonnie said curtly. "I'm not squealing on anyone for you—either of you."

SHE turned and walked on alone, her anger blazing now. So that was the way he'd bought himself into Kelcy's good graces, by squealing and trying to hang the murder on Nearing? Bonnie didn't care enough about Bruce to wonder if he had died by murder or suicide, or why. At the moment, she only saw this murder as an excuse for Saul to play the hero and the protector to Kelcy. She wished passionately that Millis would pry around until he discovered Saul's real business here. But Saul could be shrewd, and he was playing for high stakes now.

She dropped in at the restaurant in the gone daylight, spoke to the cook, and then stepped across the street to the other hotel.

As she was going up the steps, someone else was coming down. She looked up and saw Lute, who silently touched his cap to her.

"Wait a minute," Bonnie called, when she was a step or so beyond him. Lute came up to the step she was on.

"If you want to keep Nearing out of more trouble, you better take a message to him, and right now."

"What's that?"

"Saul Chenard and Kelcy McIvor are on their way to Millis' now to talk to him. They're going to tell him about the letters Bruce stole. They figure it'll give Nearing a motive for murdering Bruce."

"Well?"

"Tell Nearing to clam up," Bonnie said curtly. "They're going to send over for me to ask me about them, and I'll deny everything."

She couldn't see Lute's face in the near darkness, but she had the impression that he was staring at her with those pale, observant eyes.

"Millis will make you," Lute said slowly.

"Ha!" Bonnie laughed. "Let him try. I've faced cops before."

"He'll throw you in jail."

"So what? I eat, don't I?"

Lute thought a moment in silence, and Bonnie wondered what he was thinking.

"Listen," Lute said. "There's a shack, an empty shack, a couple of miles down river from town. It's back off the river on the edge of a slough. It's a tight shack, and there's lots of wood there. Why don't you hide out there till this blows over? I'll take you down tonight with bedding and grub and everything you need."

"Why should I hide?" Bonnie demanded. "I tell you, Millis won't get anything out of me."

"You'll be sure he won't if he can't find you, won't you?"

Bonnie was about to refuse when the advantages of the scheme occurred to her. When Saul didn't have a witness to corroborate his story, he'd be wild. Would he miss her, and would he worry about her? And beyond that there was the solid pleasure she would get out of revenge. It was worth the inconvenience to see Saul squirm. And added to that was a kind of perverse desire to help Nearing, simply because she would be frustrating Saul.

"I might at that," she said slowly, and then added, "But I'll have to put the cook wise over at the restaurant."

"Tell nobody!" Saul said curtly. "Just disappear. Will you?"

"Sure," Bonnie said lightly. "I like the idea. What's the shack like, just a heap?"

"No, trust me," Lute said, a faint excitement in his voice. "I'll go tell Frank to deny everything. Then I'll drift around to a dozen stores and pick up your outfit. After dark I'll meet you on the river below the bend. You better go up and change clothes and start out right now, just so Millis won't break in at the last moment."

"Okay." Bonnie climbed a step, then paused and looked at Lute. "Say, Nearing really didn't poison Bruce, did he?"

"Hell no!" Lute said. "I know what happened. I'll tell you tonight."

Bonnie tripped up the stairs.

LUTE hurried out into the cold dusk and went back to hitch up the dogs. That done, he drove down the main street and headed across the flats in front of the dozen or so people on the sidewalks. At the river he turned up it, and vanished a mile or so above where the river twisted. He waited then out of sight the few minutes until full darkness, then turned the team around and retraced his route as far as the flats. There, however, he kept on the river trail, passed the town and went downriver. It was dark now, and the lights of the town faded behind him, screened by the bush.

As he rounded the bend below, he kept an alert eye on the shore line, which was close and faintly visible.

Suddenly, a voice called: "Hey! Wait for me."

It was Bonnie. Lute whoaed the dogs, and called, "All set. Come on and ride."

While he was talking, he reached down into the carriole, which contained only a bed roll, a tarp, gun and axe. He brought out the axe in the darkness and leaned it against the tailboard.

Bonnie waded through the snow to the sled.

Lute handed her into the carriole and she sat down, pulling the bedroll and tarp over her.

"Say," Bonnie said suddenly. "Either this is a big sled or you haven't much grub for me."

Lute's mittened hand settled around the axe handle. "You won't have to worry about that," he said gently, before he struck.

When the job was done, he straightened her out in the bottom of the carriole and covered her with the tarp. Then he turned the team, and headed up the Raft. He was safe now, utterly safe. The two persons who had read his letter were dead, and would never talk. He would never know for sure whether Bonnie had read the letter or not. If she had, Millis' probing would have brought her memory to bear on it, and Millis was one man who could make sense out of Carl's cryptic message. If she had not read it—well, a man never died because he was too careful.

Passing the town, Lute was remember-

ing the sulphur spring on Swan Lake where the moose had gone through. A body's weight would break the ice and sink and the water would freeze over again, sealing death cleanly until distant spring. He mushed on up the river.

MILLIS tramped up the stairs, knocked and stuck his head in the door. Nearing was peeling off his shirt.

"Come in," Frank invited.

Millis yawned and came in. He looked around the room and said conversationally, "I got the kid's school report last mail. She's brighter than me." He smiled ruefully and settled into a chair. "It's a good thing she is, too, but it's not saying much for her."

"You're too modest," Frank said. "Too suspicious, too, but you're a cop. When do I get out of the doghouse? You still think they'd mob me?"

Millis clumsily concentrated on his smoke and did not look up. "No. The talk's still there, but it's off boil now. I think it's safe—only I don't want you to go."

"But why not?" Frank demanded. "Hell, if you're going to arrest me, do it. If you're not, let me go."

Millis lighted his cigarette and returned the pouch. "Back to Christmas Valley?"

"Yes. After the next mail, I'll hit for the shack."

Millis grunted. "You watch that mail plane pretty close, don't you?"

"Who doesn't, especially if they come from Outside?"

"Ever miss any mail you've been expecting?" Millis asked idly, looking up at Frank.

Frank knew instantly what he meant. He said, "No. Why should I?"

"I just wondered if young McIvor had stolen anything before he hooked those two letters of yours and opened them." Millis' pale eyes were watching him.

"So you know about them," Frank said softly.

"Of course. I know a lot of things I don't talk about."

"For instance?"

"Well, I know you had a motive for taking Bruce over to the height of land, now. It was something in those letters."

"But what?"

Millis smiled. "Give me time. I'll find that out, too." He hesitated and then said gently, "Funny, but every new thing I learn about you just makes it tougher for you. Why don't you come clean with it and get it over with?"

"With what?"

"What was in those letters. What—"

"Letter," Frank corrected. "He opened one of Lute's too. That was the second."

"So I heard. But what was in yours that would make you take McIvor up there and leave him—maybe poison him too?"

Frank was silent a long time, scowling at the pouch on the bed.

"Millis, can you imagine a man refusing to explain his actions simply because if he does explain them he'll lose something he wants pretty badly?"

Millis scowled. "Yes," he said slowly. "But like what?"

"That's it. If I tell you, I'm apt to lose it. But if you'll wait until the mail plane Friday brings a letter I'm expecting, I'll tell you. Friday I can talk."

Millis stared at him searchingly. "Mystery stuff, eh?"

"It's so simple you'll laugh," Frank said. "Friday I'll tell you every blessed thing about me you want to know—why I took Bruce over there, and—"

"About where the strychnine came from?"

Frank shook his head. "I can't."

"Can't or won't?"

Frank said nothing.

Millis said obliquely, "My God, the girl's trying to hang you. Why don't you tell where the poison came from?"

Frank said woodenly, "What are you talking about?"

Millis grinned. "I don't know. I'm just guessing. You don't look like a man who'd use strychnine. Bruce McIvor was the kind. I just figured you were keeping still about it because Kelcy didn't want it known."

Frank said, "What did you mean about the girl trying to hang me?"

"Just that. She told me about the letter of yours Bruce stole."

"She did?"

"She figures something in that letter

Bruce read made it necessary for you to shut his mouth."

Frank didn't speak for a moment as he studied the end of his cigarette.

"Nothing will ever make it necessary for me to kill a man," he said slowly.

"Sure, sure," Millis said. He rose. "This about Friday's mail is straight, is it? It'll help me settle this?"

"I doubt it," Frank said. "It's just my part in it—all of my part. But I'm telling you now, Millis, and you'll come to believe it, that Bruce had to commit suicide or die by accident. I didn't do it."

"Maybe," Millis said, and bid him good night.

AN hour after breakfast, Corporal Millis knew he was up against a stone wall in this McIvor business. Last night's disclosures by Frank had hamstrung him, rendered him impotent, although he hadn't realized it at the time. Maybe he'd been sleepy last night and missed it. This morning, it appeared to him with appalling clarity. Nearing would tell him on Friday why he took young McIvor to the height of land, thereby disclosing what was in the letter. And obviously there would be nothing there to give Nearing a motive or else Nearing wouldn't tell him about it. Everything would be explained, reasonably and without lurid disclosures. Which would leave Millis where Nearing was now—convinced that Bruce had died by suicide or accident.

Millis groaned. He didn't know why he hated so to acknowledge that Bruce McIvor committed suicide, but he did. He swore bitterly and looked bleakly upon the coming day. He was sick of this business, sick as hell of it, and he was plagued by it. But since he was helpless till Friday, he might as well forget it. There was other work to do, namely, hammer away at this Mary Paulin business, which was even worse.

He came to his feet, slammed his chair back against the wall and got his coat and cap. He was almost to the door when he remembered he hadn't locked his desk.

Coming back, he opened the bottom drawer to make sure the bottle of scorched strychnine was in there. Exhibit A, he thought, in a trial that was not going to come off. Still, he must go through the motions and send it out for routine analysis and report. Hell, what did they expect was in the bottle if it wasn't strychnine? He locked the desk and went out.

His first call was at the Star Café. Of the waitress he asked, "Miss Tucker back yet?"

"Not yet, sir," the girl said.

"Chenard in?"

"Upstairs in his room."

Saul's face was haggard as he looked up from lacing his boots.

"Did Bonnie come to you?" Saul asked quickly.

"No. So she hasn't come back, eh?"

Saul's face fell. "No. I'm going out again this morning. I'm going to look in every room of every breed's shack, and if they complain to you I don't give a damn."

Millis nodded, and observed shrewdly, "Miss her, do you?"

Saul stood up and looked levelly at Millis. "Damn right I do," he said. "I'm not ashamed of it, either. Besides, I'm worried about her."

"You think she's taken poison over you? I doubt it," Millis said drily.

"All right, laugh. But I've known her a long time, and this isn't funny."

"Right," Millis said. He started for the door. "Next time you try to handle two women at once, remember that. It isn't funny."

BACK in his office, he unlocked his desk drawers and brought out some forms. Lying there on some papers was the bottle of strychnine, its cork scorched, the powder inside a little browned.

He picked it up and held it in his palm, regarding it curiously. He might as well get that ready to go out, too. He remembered reading somewhere about strychnine death. It was agonizing, and a man was conscious all through it. The convulsions bent a man backwards almost double, and every muscle constricted until it almost burst. A man

strangled to death, really. Under the frenzied clamp of those muscles his respiration was paralyzed. He lay there with every muscle rock hard to bursting, his heart racing, his back arched, black terror in his mind and died for lack of air. Bruce McIvor had died a hell of a death, the death he had supplied to a lot of animals. It was a wry justice, Millis thought as he regarded the bottle idly. He held up the bottle to the light and shook it. It was as fine as face powder or flour, and clung to the side of the bottle in a grey film. Yes, it looked like his wife's face powder.

He tried to recall what the strychnine seized in that death at Shore Lake looked like, and he thought it was coarser grained. But not much.

Aware that he shouldn't he tampering with evidence, he jabbed his paper knife in the cork and extracted it. Somewhere he'd heard a trapper tell about baiting a set on the spot in a high wind. Some of the powder had blown out of the hole in a slice of moose liver and the man had breathed it. It speeded up his heart until he was dizzy, and then the effects died off. The stuff was dynamite, and yet it looked as innocent as frost scrapings.

Unconsciously holding his breath, Millis poured a little of the stuff onto a sheet of clean paper, and examined it gingerly. Yes, it looked like face powder or scorched flour, for it was brownish. He had begun to breath again, not noticing he had, until he was suddenly aware of a faint odor. He sniffed it cautiously. That had the smell of burned bread.

Something began ticking in the back of Millis's mind. He held his breath and leaned close to the brownish powder. Certain there was none of it in the air, he sniffed cautiously. There was the distinct smell of flour there, the same smell as around the stove when his wife began to make flour gravy.

He leaned back slowly and looked at the powder. If that stuff was flour, where would it leave him? Bruce McIvor couldn't commit suicide with flour. Then the strychnine must have been put in his food! But his stomach was empty, except for the tea. Could strychnine cling to dry tea? No. Then sugar? Ah, that was it! The sugar had fallen in the fire, and burned, leaving no evidence. But if Bruce made his tea, dumped sugar in it and drank off a cup to warm him, then his death would be explained.

And then Millis' Scots' common sense hauled him up. Wait a minute, my friend. That's too easy. You're supposing this is flour. What if it's strychnine? You don't know what scorched strychnine looks like, smells like or tastes like. All you know is that it kills you. Keep your mind open and put this stuff away and send it out for analysis.

But the implications of that scorched powder there before him was stunning. He had a nearly irresistible impulse to wet his finger, dip it in the powder and taste it. He didn't.

And then the answer crashed down in his mind.

Doc Hardy could make an analysis!

Millis came to his feet, wildly excited and cursing. He'd been a fool! Why hadn't he thought of Doc immediately? The reason was, of course, that he hadn't doubted it was strychnine before. The coroner's verdict was death from strychnine. He was sending it through the regular channels with his report for a routine analysis. Now, he had to find out! He knew one moment of doubt. Was the analysis a laboratory matter?

That vanished as he shakily poured the powder back into the bottle, corked it, and pocketed it. Yanking his coat and cap off the hook, he slammed out the door.

ONCE outside, he remembered his dignity, but in spite of it he was out of breath when he arrived at Doc Hardy's office. The nurse was in the surgery that gave onto the hospital, and she was reading a book at the doctor's desk.

Millis barely greeted her. "Where's Doc?"

"Gone for the day. A man up at Gordon's mill got a log dropped on his leg and crushed," the girl said ungrammatically.

Millis calmed down somewhat, but he was only temporarily at a loss.

"Where's his books?"

The girl pointed to the wall behind

him, where old-fashioned glass-door bookcases contained row on row of medical books.

Millis looked at them and the despair of ignorance seized him. He cast his glance again over the books. On the bottom shelf was a one volume encyclopedia.

He had an idea. Kneeling, he pulled out the encyclopedia and leafed through it until he came to "Strychnine." There were only a few lines about it, and he read them half-heartedly. But at the end, his attention stiffened. Strychnine, it said, was soluble in alcohol, ether or chloroform.

Millis put it away and said, "Has Doc got ether here?"

"Why—yes, of course. Why?"

"Put me up some in a bottle."

Millis took the bottle she gave him, thanked the bewildered girl, and hurried home again. He locked the doors of his office, house and outside, and then settled back in his chair.

He took out the strychnine bottle and uncorked it, then uncorked the ether bottle. He must remember, just in case he was on the wrong track, to save some of the powder.

He poured half the contents of the bottle into the ether.

It clotted gummily on the surface, then settled. He shook the ether bottle and let it settle again.

The powder was not dissolving! He watched it for two minutes, during which it was still visible.

Settling back in his chair he uncorked the bottle of strychnine, poured some out in his palm and tasted it.

It was flour.

Millis sat immobile, his excitement under control. His brain was working logically now, without haste, with all the cunning of which it was capable.

Nearing killed Bruce McIvor. Any other statement didn't make sense. McIvor couldn't have committed suicide with flour; therefore, the grub left him contained the poison. Friday, Frank Nearing had promised to tell what was in his letter. Perversely, Millis still believed that. In his belief that the strychnine would never be analyzed, Frank would supply the only thing missing—a motive. If he told the truth, then the case was sewed up tighter than a shroud —motive, given voluntarily; method, already known; and proof, which Millis had in his hands.

Millis thought of this for a full hour, weighing risk against risk. At the end of that hour, he silently put away the ether and the flour and locked the drawer. He'd already decided what he was going to do.

He was going to keep his mouth shut, giving Frank his freedom, until Friday.

CHAPTER XV

TRAPPED

BUT Friday dawned bright and cloudless, with a smothering, nose-pinching cold. As Millis dressed that morning he looked out over the town and saw the smoke from the breakfast fires rising straight and white and high. He put on his dress tunic of scarlet that morning, for obscure reasons of ceremony. If things went right this would be a big day in his life.

Afterwards, there were chores to do and mail to get off, and the morning passed with blessed swiftness. The noonday meal on Friday was always early on account of the plane, and Millis ate it alone. He was in the office putting on his coat when Frank came in. He was dressed for outdoors.

"Where are you going?" Millis asked.

"To meet the plane."

"I'll get your mail," Millis said. I'll get it quicker than you could, too."

"Swell, only I'd like to see the plane off. My partner's leaving."

Millis stared at him. "Westock?"

"That's right. He has to go Outside."

Millis thought quickly, a frown on his face. He shook his head and said, "Sorry, Frank, but you better stay here. The whole town's out on mail day and I don't want another scrap on my hands."

Frank sank into a chair and said resignedly, "All right, Millis. Only hurry it up. I sorta wanted to say good-by to Lute, but I guess he'll understand."

Millis hurried out into the bright cold. So Westock, his chief witness, was leav-

ing, was he? Millis thought about that while he walked over to the main street and down it, and by the time he was abreast McIvor's store he'd made up his mind.

The flats by the river were smooth and spotless with the new snow, except where the faithful plane greeters had broken a trail to the river bank.

On fair days the plane sometimes ran ahead of schedule, and today the kids and loafers had anticipated this. There were a dozen or so of them on the bank, stamping their feet and hunching their shoulders in the bitter cold.

Millis picked out Lute Westock easily. He stood a little to one side of the main group, not a part of it, his fat duffle bag beside him in the snow. He was dressed in boots and sheepskin coat.

When Millis came up to him and greeted him, Lute answered quietly. Millis stood beside him, stamping his feet, and accidentally stepped on the duffle bag. He glanced down at it, observed it with some surprise, and looked up at Lute.

"What's the luggage?"

"I'm going out," Lute answered. "Didn't Frank tell you?"

Outside? You mean you're leaving on the plane?"

"That's right." Lute's pale eyes regarded Millis carefully. And then Millis put on his act. He seemed embarrassed and troubled by turns, and then he spoke quietly, apologetically.

"I wish you wouldn't."

Lute smiled and shook his head. "I'm afraid I have to."

"How's that?"

Lute said gravely, "Frank and I have got a backer for a proposition that Frank thinks is pretty good. He's flown up from the States for two days, and I'm to meet him Outside.'

"You better not go out," Millis said mildly. "I need you here."

Lute seemed baffled, and in his eyes was a look of grave concern.

"But you can't do that," he protested. "You can't ruin the fortunes of two people on a whim."

"It's not a whim," Millis said quietly. "I told you I need you here."

Lute's gaze locked with his, and for a moment they stared stubbornly at each other. The distant drone of the plane was faintly audible, but neither of them looked up for it.

"I don't believe you can stop me," Lute said grimly.

Millis smiled unpleasantly. "I'd hate to have you call me on that," he murmured.

Lute saw the mistake he had made. He said earnestly, a touch of desperation in his voice, "But can't you see my side, Millis? I've knocked around at any job for months, living like a dog and sending Frank all the money I could spare! We've sweated and slaved and poured our guts into this, and now it'll go out the window if I don't see this man! Can't you radio ahead and have a policeman follow me? Do anything you want, only let me see this man."

Millis felt like a cur. He was a fair man, and there was nothing fair about this. On the other hand, there was nothing fair about murder. And if he let Westock go, to disappear when he heard of Frank's arrest, he'd be officially labelled an idiot, which he wasn't. No, he had to hold him. He couldn't even ease the blow by explaining why he had to hold him. And, because he wouldn't have been human if he wasn't angry at being put in a false light, Millis spoke a little roughly, with exasperation.

"I don't like this any more than you do, Westock. I'd help you if I could. This afternoon, when it's been explained to you, you'll see why. No, you can't go out on this plane. That's final."

For a moment Millis saw a wild glint in Lute's pale eyes, a brash temper that he had never suspected in the man.

"Nothing I can do, nothing I can say, no bond I can post, will change your mind?" Lute asked slowly.

The plane was near now, the time pressing. Millis said, "No, nothing will make me," and turned away.

Lute picked up his duffle and tramped back up the trail toward town.

MILLIS watched the plane land on the river, sending curtains of the new loose snow scudding in plumes behind it as it taxied over the bank. He ex-

changed a few words with the pilot as the mail was unloaded, then after the plane had left, followed the team up to McIvor's store.

The mail was taken into the postoffice, where Kelcy was waiting to sort it. She looked pale to Millis as he watched her direct the placing of the sacks. When they were alone, the wicket boarded up, Kelcy said, "Are you guarding the mail now, Corporal Millis?"

"Meaning I don't trust you, Kelcy? You know better." Millis was quiet a moment, watching her. "What's the matter with you? You sure look like hell."

Kelcy smiled faintly. "I feel like hell, if you want to know the truth. I—guess I haven't bounced back yet."

"You never will if you stay sour."

"Why shouldn't I?" Kelcy asked bitterly. "It's a rotten world, with rotten people in it."

"Like Nearing?"

"Yes, like Frank Nearing."

Millis stirred faintly and sighed. "You're young. You can take a kick like that. When you're as old as I am, it hits harder."

Kelcy looked at him curiously. "So you're beginning to believe now that Nearing did it? I mean, really believe it. You've suspected it all along."

Millis said quietly, "I don't just suspect it any more. I know it."

He was not prepared for what he saw in Kelcy's face. It was something like pain that hovered behind her eyes, and was fought down in a few seconds. He might as well break the news to her now, because she'd see the proof soon.

He told her he wanted all of Nearing's mail, and that he'd help her sort it. They worked an hour, Kelcy's swiftness making up for Millis' deliberate movements. When they were finished, there was one letter for Frank Nearing. It bore the postmark of Ft. Resource and the printed legend of the recorder's office.

"When will you get through with this?" Millis asked.

"Two hours, perhaps. Why?"

"Come over to the office afterwards, will you?"

Kelcy asked, "Is it something about that letter?"

Millis nodded and went out. Here was what he'd been waiting for, the last loose end in a tangled case.

He let himself into the office, and looked around him. Nearing wasn't there. Millis stifled his impatience, peeled off his coat and then stepped over to the tiny cell of four-by-fours.

He unlocked the padlock and opened the door.

Frank was coming down the stairs as Millis started up them. There was a deep excitement in Frank's face as Millis handed him the letter in silence. Frank hurried back up the stairs, entered his room and went over to the window, and clumsily ripped the envelope open.

He read the letter, his face strained and tense, and suddenly he smiled. Millis watched him without comment as Frank finished and turned to him.

"I guess fairy stories come true after all." Frank murmured. "Read it."

Millis read it. The letter merely said the claim was recorded, repeated the figures Frank had given and assigned a number to it.

Millis felt there was something here that he didn't understand, and asked in a normal voice, "What's the story?"

"That's Christiansen's old claim on Christmas Creek," Frank said. "There was ore there and he didn't find it. I did. But I found it before enough time had elapsed to make the claim forfeit. That letter Bruce opened was from the recorder's office, giving the rules of claim forfeiture. Bruce put two and two together, got up to the shack while I was away, had enough of a look to confirm his suspicions, then tried to blackmail me for a share in the mine.

"He had me over a barrel. I had three weeks to go before the old claim was forfeit, and in that three weeks anybody could have come in up there and fought me over the claim. If Bruce talked, I was sunk. I didn't trust him to keep quiet, because I'd seen him drunk and heard you say he was a rummy. Rather than take a chance on his blabbing it some night when he was tight, I had to get him away from people and planes and radios—away from everything, where he couldn't hurt me.

"I remembered Weymarn over on

Horn Lake. I knew Weymarn would feed him, but wouldn't spare him dogs to get back to Lobstick and wouldn't bring him back. Bruce would be over there where his talk wouldn't harm me." He grinned. "That's why I didn't want you searching Christmas Valley for him, like Kelcy suggested. You'd have turned up my strike, and the news would be out. That's why I took you over to Horn Lake, away from the strike. That one damned secret, Millis, is what I've been trying to keep. What do—" He paused.

Millis was staring at him, transfixed, his jaw sagging a little in amazement.

Frank laughed at the sight of him. "I told you it would be so simple you wouldn't believe it."

MILLIS said something then. It was spoken with deep pity, with a bare belief, and it was something that Millis dragged out of childhood and the memory of a Scots grandfather who would have said the same thing.

"Man," he said gently, "are ye daft?"

"I wouldn't know," Frank said easily. "I don't think so."

Millis' mouth closed with a little click of his teeth. He said courteously, "I have something for you downstairs, Frank. Go ahead."

Going down the stairs, Millis unfastened the flap of his holster.

Frank walked up to the desk and turned to face Millis, who said gently, "See that cell with the door open, Nearing? Get inside."

"But—"

"Get in there, I said!" Millis' voice was cold. His gun was in his hand.

Something in Millis' tone, a wildness and an anger and a hatred, warned Frank this was no time to argue.

He walked in the cell and watched Millis close and lock the door on him.

"Why?" Frank asked.

Millis went over to the desk, unlocked it and returned with the bottle.

"Is that the bottle we found under Bruce McIvor?" Millis asked.

Frank took it through the bars, examined it and handed it back. "That's it. Some of the stuff is gone."

"That's right. It was tested. That white stuff that was in there was flour."

Frank just stared at him, bewildered. "Flour?"

"Flour, not strychnine! That means Bruce McIvor didn't commit suitcide. He didn't have any strychnine to do it with. So there's only one thing left, Nearing. The food you left him was poisoned. It was the sugar." Millis raised a stubby hand, spread his fingers, and started ticking them off, his voice implacable. "One, you struck an ore body, and whether you got it depended on its being kept a secret. Two, Bruce discovered that secret. Three, you put strychnine in the grub you gave him and took him up to the height of land and left him. Four, Bruce was found dead from strychnine poisoning."

Millis' hands sank to his side. If he heard the knock on his office door, he pretended he hadn't. "Motive, method and corpse. Figure it out. Altogether, it spells hanging, Nearing."

FRANK sank down on the cot. His mind simply refused to work. He heard Millis speak and then saw Kelcy McIvor. He heard her say, "I let Dad sort the mail, because I wondered—" She paused. "Is that Frank Nearing?"

Frank didn't hear any more. He was vaguely aware of Millis talking, of Kelcy talking. Slowly, lumberingly, the significance of what Millis had said was sinking into his mind and flagging it into thought. Not the part about hanging, for that didn't register. It was the part about the strychnine—or flour. He considered that a moment, slowly and thoughtfully and critically. Bruce couldn't have committed suicide with flour, true. He wouldn't have carried flour in that sort of a bottle, and besides, Frank remembered that bottle. Then his food must have been poisoned, his sugar, of course, because that would take the strychnine. True. Then only three persons had the chance to put the strychnine in the sugar—himself, Charlie and Lute.

He heard the door open again, and heard Charlie's voice. Behind thought he knew that would be Charlie coming in without the letter he'd been awaiting for

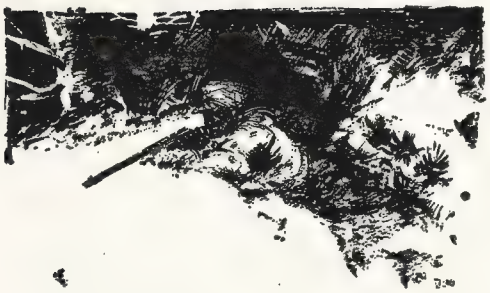
He levered in a shell and came fighting to his knees.

in McIvor's store to tell him the bad news. He heard Millis and Charlie talking, heard the conversation grow sharp and three-cornered.

He was thinking about the three of them there at the shack, and immediately he thought of Lute. He recognized that as prejudice, and thought of Charlie as the poisoner. Nonsense. He himself didn't do it. So he settled on Lute. Why would Lute poison Bruce? He wouldn't; he didn't know him, didn't associate with him, stood to lose nothing if Bruce talked about the mine.

Millis' and Charlie's voices were raised in anger, and Frank barely noted it. He must leave Lute's motive for the present and think of the means. The grub was packed the night before they left, the strychnine bottle set on the bookshelf. Of course! Lute knew it was strychnine and he sat up guarding Bruce all night! He could have poisoned the sugar, and filled the strychnine bottle with flour. He was beginning to feel a gathering excitement now, and his mind was working better, faster.

Bruce stole the strychnine. Why? He didn't know. To take the evidence against him, to poison his captors, to poison their dogs so they couldn't go on to the height of land? Frank's mind clamped on that last possibility, and then it came to him. That day they left Bruce



on the height of land when he went back to get tobacco! He went back to poison the dogs! That explained his strange bet with Frank on how long it would take them to get to Lobstick.

Millis was shouting; Charlie's soft voice was raised in wrath, and still Frank didn't hear. Lute could have done it, did do it, but why? His mind beat about that question for seconds, and then Frank pulled it up and directed it. Lute was hiding because his wife was persecuting him. Did Bruce know that? No, he couldn't—yes, he could! That letter of Lute's Bruce had opened! But Lute wouldn't kill Bruce to keep him from telling of him hiding out to dodge alimony payments. What had Bruce said that night to Lute? "As soon as I get a newspaper to check on something I'll know about you." Alimony cases weren't in the newspapers. Then it was something else in that letter, not the alimony business, or why the mention of the newspapers? Immediately, Frank's memory slipped to the letter from Carl that Lute had shown him. Was that a forgery (it could be) so Lute could sneak out on the plane to the safety of anonymity Outside before Millis discovered that the strychnine was flour?

And with that thought, which was conviction, too, Frank lunged to his feet, crashing the cot against the wall, and bellowed, "Millis!"

The talk out there died, and Millis came to the bars.

"Radio ahead and stop that plane! Tell the pilot to turn around and watch out for Lute Westock! He's your killer!"

"He's not on it," Millis said curtly. "I held him here as a material witness."

"Where is he?"

"At the hotel. He'll be over soon."

"Get him!" Frank raged. "He's your killer, Millis, and he'll get away! You kept him off the plane. He's probably headed out of here by now!"

Millis said dryly, "You're a little slow on the uptake, Nearing. I figured you'd be hollering that either Charlie or Westock did it before I had the door locked on you."

"Listen to me," Frank said swiftly, harshly. "Go get him! Arrest him and hold him and I'll tell you how he did it!"

"I know how it was done," Millis said.

Frank gripped the timbers until his hands were white. Then he called to Charlie, "Go find out, Charlie! If he's in town, bring him here! Hurry!"

Charlie raced for the door. Millis watched him, a faint smile on his face. Kelcy was watching Frank with a strange intentness.

AND then Frank began to talk. He explained swiftly, hurriedly, almost incoherently, how Lute could have done it. He told it all, about the letters and about Lute's story of dodging alimony. Millis listened politely, without any conviction in his face, and when Frank was finished Millis said, "And you expect me to believe he killed Bruce because Bruce knew about his dodging alimony?"

"That's just what I don't want you to believe!" Frank raged. "It was a stall, I tell you! Listen, Millis. I told you Lute was my partner! He wasn't! I was hiding him—for two thousand dollars, no questions asked."

Millis shook his head. "I've listened to a hundred, two hundred men try to crawl out from under their guilt. It goes just like this. Some stories are good, some are bad. This is bad."

But Frank wasn't beaten. "Millis, listen to me. What are my rights, here? Can I send a radio message? If I can't, will you send one for me?"

"I will. What is it?"

"Radio Joe Phillips at Force Lake, Ontario. Tell him to go to the police barracks and give them a minute description of Lute Westock. Tell him to ask them to look in their files, to broadcast his description, to find out if he's

wanted. Ask him to check on a Carl, a lawyer, that Lute knew. Will you do that?"

Millis said patiently, "I'll do it. I'll even sign it and send it to the police myself and ask them for Joe Phillips' confirmation. Is that all right?"

"It's fine," Frank said bitterly. "While you're at it, you might as well radio for some search planes, too, to help you find Westock after you get their answer."

"I know what their answer will be right now. It will read, 'Description vague. Send further details.' I'll wire them again; they'll wire me again. We'll swap a dozen wires until I call the whole thing off. But I'll send it."

There was the sound of someone running outside, and a moment later Charlie burst through the door.

"He's gone!" he panted. "The dogs are gone, too!"

"All right, Millis," Frank whipped out. "What about it?"

Millis shrugged indifferently. "I'm being punished, that's all. Westock is sore because I broke off your deal and—"

"What deal?"

"The deal you had with a mining promoter outside. He was going out to fix it up."

"I didn't have any deal hanging fire!" Fire raged. "He lied to you! Doesn't that prove it?"

Millis shook his head wearily. "Nearing, you just got through telling me you had an ore discovery. Are you trying to tell me now that Westock wasn't going out to get the backing to mine it?"

Frank groaned softly in a bleak and savage disgust.

Millis went on, "As I said, Westock was sore about it. He's probably headed up the Wailing, and is going to make me come after him."

"You fool!" Frank shouted. "You damned knot-headed fool, I tell you he's running away!"

Millis straightened up and sighed. When he spoke, his tone was curt, firm. "I've had enough of this, Nearing. I've told you what I'll do. I'll wire out to the Force Lake station about Westock. I'll send a man up for Westock tomorrow. I'll engage any high-power lawyer you want. But it all changes nothing. You're under arrest for the murder by poison of Bruce McIvor. You'll be tried, and take your medicine."

FRANK asked, "May I have a word with Charlie alone?"

"Not alone. I'll go over in the corner where I can watch you. First, I'll have to search him."

Charlie came over, holding up his hands as he had seen men do in the movies.

"Put 'em down, cowboy," Millis growled.

While the search went on, Kelcy came slowly over to the cell and looked at Frank. His eyes were filled with a wild despair, but when he looked at her his glance softened a little.

"I didn't kill Bruce, Kelcy. If I hang for it, I still didn't kill him."

"I believe that," Kelcy said, her voice curiously faltering.

Frank looked at her searchingly, hope creeping into his eyes. "But you told Millis about the letter. He said you wanted to hang me."

"I don't know why I did it, Frank!" Kelcy said passionately. "I'm so confused, so helpless! Saul Chenard told me I should! I did against my better judgment. But I'm wrong! Oh, Frank, I know you didn't do it now. I feel it, I'm sure of it, I—he's got to believe you!"

Frank looked wonderingly at her, understanding now what she had gone through and not hating her. He had never hated her. But her words now were conviction; she'd found herself, and he knew it and it filled him with a hot, fighting pride.

"Go home, Kelcy," he murmured. "I'll get out of here, so help me."

"Can I help?"

"Yes. Go home and keep believing I didn't do it."

His hand was on the crossbar. Kelcy reached in and squeezed it, and then turned swiftly and went out.

Millis retreated to a far corner and Charlie came over.

Frank said softly, "Charlie, where's he headed?"

"The barrens. He'd have to. All the posts and the railways south will be watched."

"Can you find out for sure? They're our dogs he's got and our sled. You know the track they leave. The snow is new, and you might pick up some sign in the couple hours of daylight left. Can you?"

"I'll try."

"If you can find anything, we've got a chance. Now listen carefully." His voice sank to a whisper, stayed there a long time. At the finish of it, Charlie nodded, did not smile, and left.

CHAPTER XVI

VENGEANCE TRAIL

THE hours until supper that night were the longest Frank had ever spent. He lay on his cot, hearing Millis fussing with papers at his desk, and thought of Lute. Not of Lute's guilt, because he was certain of that, but of Lute's destination. Would Lute head south, for Outside? Once there, of course, he could vanish. But it was ten days' travel by dog team to the end of steel, and another three days on the train before he would be out of the bush.

Would Lute figure that his secret could be kept that long? No. He wasn't a fool. He would figure that even with good luck it wouldn't take the police more than a few days to discover the poison in Bruce's bottle was flour. After that, they'd broadcast his description and every post and especially the train would be watched closely. Going south, he'd walk into a trap.

That left east, west and north, the bush country. And Frank didn't fool himself; Lute was a bushman. East or west, they'd be searching for him in planes, watching every post, quizzing Indians and trappers for any strange sign. Sooner or later they'd pick him up.

That left the north and the Barren Lands. That was a country so big it couldn't be searched. Only the hardiest and toughest men trapped it, and they went out in the summer and came back in the summer, with no town trips in between. A lonely, self-reliant type, they didn't give a damn about the law, which never reached them. Lute was safe among them until the summer, and then he could throw in with a roving family of Eskimos who seldom saw a post. When the talk died down, when he was given up for dead and the vigilance was relaxed, he could work south to freedom. It might take a couple of years, but it could be done. The only thing stopping him would be his lack of an outfit. In the bleak country where if a man missed the caribou herds he starved to death, an outfit was important, and Lute didn't have one. But if Lute hadn't stopped at murder here, he wouldn't stop at murder there. Barren Lands trappers had outfits, and trappers could be killed for them. Lute was already facing death, and one more crime wouldn't make any difference.

Those were the odds Lute faced—tough, but not impossible. And Frank was certain Lute would head north. Charlie, with similar reasoning, thought so too. It was only a hunch, but the one they were going to play.

After supper, when Millis was in the office again, Charlie returned, his dark face blank. He paused just inside the door again and asked Millis if he could talk with Frank—alone. Again Millis said yes, again searched him and retired to the far corner.

Charlie came up to the cell.

"Everything ready?" Frank murmured.

Charlie nodded.

"Play it fast," Frank said. "Now, give me the paper."

Charlie reached in his hip pocket and took out a paper which he gave to Frank. Frank opened it, and pretended to read it.

Then he said in a voice which Millis could hear, "But you ought to give it to him, Charlie."

"No," Charlie said.

"But he ought to see it. Let me give it to him, will you?"

Charlie pretended to hesitate, then shrugged.

"Take a look at this, Millis," Frank called. "Charlie found it in the wastebasket in Lute's hotel room."

Millis was curious. He came across the room to take the paper which Frank extended through the timber bars. He

stood there beside Charlie, unfolding the paper.

Frank looked at Charlie and nodded. Charlie took a slow step to one side, putting Millis between him and the cell.

And then Charlie lunged, throwing the whole weight of his body into Millis. Millis was taken by surprise. He went off balance, and staggered back a step, and his broad shoulders hit the cell timbers with wall-shaking impact. Charlie pinned him solidly, his shoulder in Millis' chest. Millis slugged up at him, and then Frank's arms came through the bars. One arm wrapped around Millis' midriff, and his other hand settled over Millis' mouth. For five seconds, as Charlie backed off and set himself, Millis wrestled savagely, tearing at Frank's hands and heaving away from the timbers until Frank's arms strained in their sockets to hold him.

And then Charlie hit him. It was a blow on the jaw that cracked loud and sharp in the silence, and it drove Millis' head back against the timber bar with a vicious sledgehammer force. Frank felt Millis go limp under him, and he let him slowly down to the floor.

SILENTLY, Charlie rifled Millis' pockets until he found the key. Then he unlocked the door and Frank stepped out and knelt by Millis. He felt the back of Millis' head and murmured, "You hit him too hard, Charlie."

"I guess I did," Charlie admitted, and added mildly, "Damn him, anyway."

"Give a hand." They lifted Millis between them and lugged him into the cell and onto the cot. Charlie gave Frank a roll of tape, and while Frank taped Millis' mouth shut, Charlie uncoiled a length of small rope from around his waist. They trussed Millis securely, then stepped out, locked the cell again and Frank pocketed the key.

Afterwards, Frank quietly locked the door that let into the house, while Charlie went outside. In a moment, he returned with a fur cap, mittens and parka, all new. Frank donned them and then blew out the lamp, turned the lock on the door and stepped out into the clear cold night.

Charlie led the way to the darkened road. Fifty yards away from the house two dog teams were waiting—one Bruce's dogs, which Charlie brought down days ago from Swan Lake and had been feeding up at the hotel before he returned them, the other his own light team.

"Your outfit's in my sled," Charlie said. "I fed the dogs two hours ago and you've got a two-day ration of dog feed with you. When you hit the fur portage, keep north. You'll see a trail turning east, but it's a wood trail, not Lute's." He hesitated. "He's got a five-hour head start on you, but he'll have to break trail."

"His dogs are heavier, but mine are faster," Frank countered.

There was an awkward pause, and Charlie blurted out, "Damn it, Frank, be careful."

They shook hands briefly, and Frank untied the tail rope. He spoke quietly to Charlie's dogs, who loafed into motion. Once clear of Millis' house, he took out the whip and cracked it once. The dogs broke into a long lope as they skirted the town, hit the river and headed for the fur portage.

Somewhere out there, Lute was bulling it through the night, trying to put as much distance between himself and Lobstick as he could.

And somewhere on these distant silent lakes he and Lute would meet.

The second day out, Frank heard the first plane. He was two hundred yards out on the bald surface of a small lake when he heard it, and panic seized him. He shouted at the dogs in a wild voice and they raced for the portage at which he was aiming.

Once on land among the trees, he hewed the dogs off the trail under some screening spruce, and then stood there panting, listening. The plane was closer now, but still far distant.

Moving to the edge of the spruce, he scanned the sky. Luck had been with him so far—and with Lute—for this morning, the morning they were most likely to start the search, the sky was overcast.

In these two days since he left, the trails around Lobstick would have grown

to be numerous and confusing. Added to that bit of luck was the overcast sky, which would not throw shadows visible to a plane. That meant the searchers up there must wait for a clear sky, when the early or late sun laid its blue shadow on the edge of the trail to guide the searchers. And, unless the weather was deceiving, a snow was due shortly. That would finish covering up the trail. The only thing left to the planes then was a tour in an ever widening circle, running down the trails of every trapper in the bush.

FRANK saw the plane at last. It was far to the east, heading north in a straight line. Someone was playing a hunch, a wrong hunch. Frank gnawed on a piece of half frozen bannock and eyed Charlie's dogs critically. They were a tough bunch, but not as tough as his own team, which Lute was driving. They had speed, but not as much stamina as his own, and right now it was speed he wanted. For Lute was having to break trail, while Frank traveled faster on the trail Lute had already broken. A snow would change that. It would mean that his fast trail was gone, and he was on equal terms with Lute, who had the better dogs.

When the plane had gone, Frank swung his team onto the trail again and set out. Now he could judge how far Lute was ahead of him, for Lute would have ducked into the brush just as he had. It was four hours later when he came to the spot where Lute had pulled off a bare trail into the bush. That meant Frank had cut Lute's head start down from five hours to four.

That was not good. He should have done better. It meant, of course, that Lute was pushing his dogs, Frank's dogs, to their very limit.

It began to snow soon afterwards, and Frank watched it glumly in the gone day. It was time to camp, but he ignored that. He was putting his dogs to their first test. A smart leader could smell out a snow-covered trail, and it was important that he find out if this leader was smart, for much hinged on it. If he was smart, it meant night travel.

Three hours later in that snow-piling darkness, Frank had his answer, and it was given to him in the moiling, wind-scoured dark of a big lake. He came across a fresh trail—a too fresh trail, and knew it for his own. The wind hadn't been shifting to all points of the compass, as he thought; Charlie's dogs had circled.

Frank put them north, kept them there by the wind, and an hour later made his late camp on the shore. Tomorrow, he knew, he would lose an hour finding Lute's trail, and from here on it would be slow and heavy work. He fed his dogs half rations, himself less than half, and rolled into his bedroll, tasting his first discouragement. From now until the snow ceased he and Lute would travel, long hours at the same speed and with the same trail conditions, keeping that same ten or twelve miles between them. And only when the snow stopped and he picked up Lute's broken trail again would he have his second chance to overtake him.

It snowed for five long days. Frank trailed Lute by instinct then, for Lute's trail, a faint rounded groove in the snow's surface, was drifted over by the wind. He was having to watch the trail closely now for dog food—the carcasses of the game that Lute was sure to have to kill if he wanted to keep his dogs alive. Frank saw the first caribou carcass and used it.

When the snow finally fell off and the sun broke out, the planes were at it again. Frank counted three on the eighth day. For four hours of daylight on that day he huddled with his dogs under the inadequate screen of some scrub tamarack. He was hungry all the time now, for his bannock had given out and his flour was gone and he was living on meat, like his dogs.

THE bush was thinning out, making it harder to hide his trail under the shore trees. And every hour of the day he was listening for those planes, his nerves drawing wire thin, his belly gnawing with hunger. Soon, maybe tomorrow, he would come to a spot where his trail couldn't be hidden, and he'd have to

take to the thinning bush, casting back at night for Lute's trail. That might work until the next snow. But after that, he couldn't do it. He couldn't drive his dogs miles off the trail for the shelter of the bush, and then expect to pick up Lute's trail after dark.

He looked across the blazing white lake stretched out in front of him. A month from now, a man could see mirages on this lake, just like desert. Now it was lonely as the cold stars he would see tonight. Somewhere off there, huddled under some trees, was Lute, watching the planes with his patient, cunning eyes.

For a long, bitter hour, Frank cast up his own chances, and they were slim. He was licked by Lute's dogs, which were tougher and better than these courageous dogs by his side.

It came to him then that a gamble might do it. If he failed, he was finished and might as well turn back. But it was his only chance of success.

When the planes droned off, Frank put his tired dogs onto the lake again, hugging the shore. In mid-afternoon, he came across the carcass of a caribou calf that Lute had killed the day before. Frank took a quarter and went on, turning over his plan in his mind.

The first step was to reach the far end of the lake, cross the portage and see what lay beyond, and he'd have to do it during daylight. His trail be damned! He'd have to take the chance of laying it out across the lake for the planes to spot.

He cut across the lake for the upper portage, pushing his dogs, using his whip. Out on the lake the snow was drifted hard, and he drove his dogs mercilessly through that afternoon, keeping an eye out for planes and silently praying that they wouldn't catch him out here in the open.

His dogs would be done at the end of this day; he could see that. And he didn't care. The narrow strip of black ahead that announced the portage grew taller and finally took on the green cast on conifers. He reached land as the late sun was heeling into the west. It was hurry now, and hurry fast. On the portage he found Lute's camp of the night before. It was the first camp he'd found in days that wasn't snowed over.

He reached the far end of the two mile portage at the fading of daylight. His dogs dropped in their tracks as he walked past them to look at the lake. His heart beat faster at the sight that greeted him.

This lake was long, its far shore out of sight. Crossing that lake meant a day's travel for Lute, considering the time he had had to hide today. He'd be camped at its upper portage tonight.

Frank unhooked his dogs, laid the last of the food where they could get it, cut off a chunk for himself and put it in his pocket, then brought out his snow-shoes.

As the last light died in the west, he stepped out onto the lake, rifle over his shoulder. He had from now until daylight, fourteen hours, in which to overtake Lute. The trail Lute had broken that day would do him no good, for Lute had clung to the shore line. Frank was cutting across. And if he failed—

The night was clear, and Frank's mind settled into that timeless, unthinking blank that comes to a man long alone and physically tired. He remembered little of it, except that he watched the Big Dipper wheel in that cold sky, silently ticking off the hours he had left. He was beyond tiredness, and his walking was almost a reflex action.

IT WAS some time after six o'clock, after twelve hours of walking, when he saw the shore line loom up in the night ahead of him. He stopped, too tired to do anything but gaze stupidly at the shore. Was Lute camped there somewhere on this portage? How would he approach him? His dogs would be chained around him, and dogs always wakened at this hour of the morning, the coldest, to stretch and whine and shift their positions.

From some deep well of stubborn strength, Frank called up enough reserve to get moving again. When he reached shore, he kicked out of his snowshoes and sank to his knees in the loose snow. It was work, agony, to walk without them, but they were too noisy. He wallowed on into the bush, staggering with

weariness, and entered the trees as quietly as night falling.

The portage, like all these other portages, was a low strip of land between two lakes joined by a stream. Somewhere along that stream Lute would be camped.

Frank pushed on, his pace infinitesimal. He kept high on the slope, for his scent would rise above the dogs. The night in here was thick black vellum.

He'd have to hurry. Lute would be ready to travel by daylight. He felt the lip of a rock ledge under him now, running parallel to the stream. He traveled it slowly, feeling his way deeper and deeper into the portage. A crawling fear was in him now, and he knew it was of his own making, bred by his own stealth. And suddenly, the futility of what he was doing came to him. There was nobody here.

He hunkered down there in the snow and hung his head, beaten and boneweary and not even angry. And then a noise seeped into his consciousness, and he raised his head. He was imagining it, but he listened until he could hear the blood pumping through his veins. And then it came again, off to the left and below him, the thin and quavering whine of a dog.

All the weariness fell away, and he sat there immobile, his blood on fire. Gently he rose, more gently took a step to his left along the ledge. And another. He waited then, and the sound didn't come again. He took another step and then he squatted again. He was miserably cold, now, and sweating, yet he was afraid to move lest he alarm the camp.

He would have to wait, even if his inactivity meant frostbitten fingers and toes, until Lute rose and made a fire.

He sat there fifteen minutes, twenty minutes, staring at that blackness. And presently, he realized that it was getting lighter. He could make out a gray-black smear of snow in a clearing below him.

And then he knew something was wrong. If it was daylight, Lute should be up!

He came slowly erect and took a step backwards, and then something slashed him in the shoulder and slammed him around and the flat crack of a rifle filled the night. He fell on his side, hearing the boiling and immediate barking of the startled dogs.

Now they'd get him. . . .

Lute had been waiting for him! Lute had expected him!

The snow was deep where he fell, and he was hidden. To rise was to die, and he knew it. Besides, he didn't know where Lute was. And then he did the only thing he could.

He made a faint gagging sound and lay still. The seconds ribboned on. Again the rifle cracked. He heard the slug slap

the stone beyond his head. He lay utterly still, waiting for the third slug that would drive the life out of him.

Then came an uneasy whine, and on top of that the thump, thump of a dog's tail on the frozen snow.

That meant Lute was moving, passing a dog, coming toward him. Frank's rifle was still in his hand. He couldn't cock it, or the noise would give him away. He grasped it firmly, then slowly turned his head toward the edge of the ledge, panic chilling him. He couldn't lie here and let Lute put his gun over the ledge and shoot him.

SHE raised his head then in the half light. Four feet away, he saw six inches of Lute's gun, barrel waving upright as Lute would hold it to climb the sleep slope. Frank rolled his body and swung his gun like a club over the ledge.

It crashed into Lute's gun with a metallic clang, and then into Lute, and then Frank's momentum carried him over the ledge and down the slope.

Lute had gone over backward, and he fell and rolled, too. Fear driving him, Frank cocked his gun as he skidded to a stop in the moiling snow.

Lute's gun crashed out again, and Frank came to his knees, hearing Lute lever in yet another shell. The place that sound came from was a gray blur against the trees and Frank in his panic held his rifle out like a pistol and pointed it at the spot and pulled the trigger. The rifle kicked up and he tried to raise his left arm to steady it and his arm wouldn't move. Moaning, he rolled over in the snow and got the gun between his legs and levered in a shell and came fighting to his knees.

And only then did he realize Lute had not shot again. Frank waited there on his knees, snow in his eyes and mouth, and sought for that gray blur. It wasn't there, and the dogs were barking savagely.

Slowly, he staggered to his feet and lunged over to Lute and dropped beside him. Lute's face was only a blur to him, half buried in the snow. He could hear Lute's breath bubbling out, and he reached out and pushed him on his back. Lute raised a hand to strike at him, but he couldn't make it. His hand fell to his side, and his breath bubbled and gurgled.

Lute opened his eyes. He stared blankly at Frank, and then turned his head away.

"Lute, why did you do it? Lute!"

Lute moved his head imperceptibly in negation and then shut his eyes. Seconds later the bubbling faded off, and he was dead.

FRANK got a fire going first, and then laggingly peeled off his clothes by its warmth to look at his wound. It was in his shoulder, and it was seeping blood and beginning to come to life with a fiery throbbing. Under his fingers, he could feel the bone moving. But now he had to stop the bleeding. Lute had a little flour left. Frank plastered it to the hole, fistful after fistful, until it clotted and plugged the wound. Afterwards, he took the meat from his parka pocket, impaled it on a stick, and while his breakfast was cooking, dragged in all the wood, rotten and otherwise, that he could find.

Frank ate and talked to the dogs to hear the sound of his voice, and then in the clear bright morning he threw the rotten logs on the fire. They lifted a blue smoke high into the still air. Afterwards, he rolled up in Lute's bedroll to wait in an unthinking and brain-beaten weariness.

In mid-morning he heard the first plane. He got up to watch it, and knew immediately that the pilot had spotted his smoke. The noise of the motor grew louder, and then he caught sight of the plane circling and losing altitude. The sound faded, and then it grew stronger and stronger, and presently the plane came over him, just above the tree tops. Frank waved his arm and gave them a good view of him.

The plane vanished, and the noise faded off and after a long wait he heard it returning again, taxiing on the lake.

Frank dropped weakly on the bedroll, dully observing the camp. Well, he'd got Lute, and now they'd get him. There were no witnesses.

It turned out to be Millis who led the three men who tramped into camp.

Frank gestured to the brush where Lute lay, and then hung his head wearily. The three of them—all police, Frank supposed—went immediately to Lute. Afterwards, Millis came over to him. His face was red with cold.

"You're hurt!" Millis said abruptly, noting his bloody parka.

"Shot in the shoulder. It isn't bleeding, and I can wait till we get in. Will you bring the dogs?" He thought of something and looked up at Millis and said, "I know I won't need them, but Charlie will—after he gets out of jail for slugging you."

"Sure," Millis said. He helped Frank to his feet, then called to the others to bring Lute and the dogs.

Frank could hardly stand up, but he made it across the short portage to the plane. He was put on the seat beside the pilot, and Millis and the pilot left him and went back to camp. Presently, they appeared with Lute's body and the dogs, which were all loaded in.

Frank told the pilot about Charlie's team and considered his duty done. He sat in the seat, feeling sick and weary and dead as the plane took off.

Suddenly, a hand holding a whiskey bottle was thrust in front of him.

"Take a big jolt," Millis said. "It'll help prepare you for the news."

Frank did. The whiskey felt first like ice water, and then it exploded into a warm heat in his stomach, coursing through his veins like gentle snakes.

"Ready?" Millis asked.

Frank nodded, and Millis thrust a folded paper in his hands. It was a radiogram, and read:

LEON WESTPHAL, ALIAS LUTHER WESTOCK, WANTED FOR SABOTAGE EXPLOSION AT DOMINION NICKEL PLANT ONTARIO IN WHICH FIVE KILLED AND PLANT WRECKED OCT. 16. CARL DORN, DOMINION BOOKKEEPER AND ACCOMPLICE CONFESSED ON ARREST THROUGH YOUR ADVICE. DORN AND WESTPHAL ENEMY AGENTS. JOE PHILLIPS NOT. WHY QUERY? McLEOD, FORCE LAKE

Frank read it twice and yet a third time, too weary to be surprised, and he heard Millis' low chuckle behind him.

"So he's the partner you took for two thousand dollars?" Millis said. "You've learned something."

"Yes," Frank said slowly.

"Westock's score altogether was eight," Millis continued. "Your Charlie on his way to draw us off your trail up the Wailing turned something up at Swan Lake. Trust an Indian; the trail didn't look right. He found Bonnie Tucker, number six, dumped in a sulphur spring. And since it was Bonnie that was wanted when Mary Paulin was shot, we'll raise the count to seven. Bruce McIvor makes eight."

"But why did he kill Bonnie?"

"Saul Chenard's guess is that he thought she knew the same thing Bruce knew. By the way, you needn't be shy about where that strychnine came from. Kelcy told me. I've got Saul in jail, due for a put-away for wholesale strychnine peddling. And he doesn't give a damn, now that his girl's dead."

Frank turned further around to see Millis' face. At that moment his shoulder gave him a twinge that drained the blood out of his face and made him forget all of it.

AT the hospital in Lobstick, which they reached two hours later, Doc Hardy gave Frank another drink and examined and cleaned his shoulder.

"You deserve to die for putting that flour in there," Doc Hardy said scathingly. "But I'm not going to kill you. You're going out to a surgeon who knows more about bone splinters than I do."

He heard voices out in the office, and then Millis, Kelcy and Charlie trailing him, came in. He understood Charlie's proud grin and replied with one of his own, and then he regarded Kelcy. There was a high excitement in her blue eyes.

"Doc Hardy says you're a poor case," Kelcy said. "Not worth bothering with."

Millis had gone to close the door and now he came over to the bedside. His expression was grave.

"A man's got to live with his conscience," he began, "so I might as well

start." A long troubled pause, and then he spoke in an ironic tone of voice. "They think I'm something out at headquarters. They figure I broke this case. That radio you told me to send to Force Lake and that I signed instead of you turned the trick. And then there was that plane that I wouldn't let Westock take. That's to my credit too. Your jail break was just tough luck, they think; and I hope I die if this isn't the truth, but they've forgiven me for assuming that the flour was strychnine. All in all, I'm quite a fair-haired lad, and they think I'm something special."

His voice trailed off, and he was regarding Frank with a stubborn honesty. And Frank was suddenly aware that Millis was asking advice humbly in front of his friends. He wanted to know if he should tell his superiors the truth.

"Let them think it," Frank said. "A man accepts his luck, doesn't he? Besides, I think you're a damn good police officer, Millis. One of the best."

Millis looked at him searchingly and then the old grin broke on his face.

"So do I," he agreed.

He took Charlie out with him, and Kelcy sat on the edge of the bed, holding Frank's hand in hers. Frank wondered if he was a little drunk. He concluded that drunk or sober, he would think her the loveliest girl he knew.

He said, "We got off to a bad start, didn't we?"

"You were a bear," Kelcy said. "Come to think of it, I was something of a dirty-nosed little tramp myself."

"Agreed." Frank grimaced. "The trouble with me was I had a bad case of wanting gold in my pockets."

"Are you ashamed of that?"

"Not a bit. I'm explaining—apologizing, maybe, for something I've neglected. And that's you, my dear."

They sat in silence a moment, looking at each other without troubling to talk. They were new and different to each other.

"I've been thinking," Kelcy said. "Would you like me to go with you?"

"I was coming to that," Frank said.

Kelcy said soberly, "It'll be a long stretch in the hospital for you, Doc says. I'd miss you if I stayed. I've just discovered that the last week hasn't been any fun."

"I know a place—" Frank began lazily, dreamily.

Kelcy leaned over and kissed him. "You can tell me that on the plane, Frank. I'll be back as soon as I can get another dress and a comb."

Frank watched her go out. His shoulder was hurting and he was a little drunk, he thought, and yet he'd never felt better.

THE END

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It is available again. With requests coming in almost every week, although it has not been advertised for years, and with our own supply down to a single copy, ADVENTURE has ordered a large reprint of this famous booklet. The price is ten cents.

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THE PICK OF SIX-GUNS

By DALE CLARK

Johnnie Ellsworth hesitated only a moment.

THE schoolteacher, after washing the whiskey stain from her travel-dress, hurried from the hotel's kitchen to its front door. She found the fat, shirt-sleeved proprietor barring her way.

"I wouldn't go outside yet, Miss."

"But the stage is waiting for me," Mary McBride said.

"It'll wait. . . . You better," the fat man told her, "go back in the kitchen. This fightin' ain't anything for you to be seein'."

"Fighting!" cried Mary McBride, with dismay in her voice.

Staring around the man's shoulder,

she looked through the open doorway and across a dirt sidewalk blackly shaded by a wooden awning. The plaza, treeless and fetlock-deep with dust, lay empty in the glare of the mid-day sun. She saw with surprise that the Black Hills stage had moved around to the far side of the square. Half a dozen cow ponies likewise had vanished from the hitching posts, and their owners with them. There were, in the whole length and width of the street, exactly two figures in sight.

Mary McBride said thinly, "Mr. Hannis wouldn't . . . why, that boy is drunk!"

Johnnie Ellsworth had been applying himself to the bottle since the stage left Deadwood. Johnnie, at nineteen, considered himself slighted in the affections of a dance-hall girl. His opinion of the fairer sex was at lowest ebb; he had said so, with eloquent gestures—with a gesture, in fact, that spilled whiskey upon Mary McBride's dress. Mr. Bill Hannis, riding shotgun, thereupon felt constrained to rebuke the youth sharply. Johnnie took offense, but sulkily and in silence. There hadn't been, in Mary McBride's presence, anything more to it than exchanged dark looks.

Now, as she stared into the plaza, she knew that Mr. Bill Hannis had suggested that she go to the kitchen and clean up because he'd anticipated trouble.

"Come on, Hannis," young Ellsworth was challenging. "Put up, or crawl down. You've talked big, now let's see the size of your play."

This, without raising his voice in the slightest. They were both, indeed, exaggeratedly quiet of manner, regarding each other across a dozen paces with pronounced formality.

Johnnie Ellsworth was in the street, hands flat at his sides and the right only inches from the pearl-stocked gun holstered on his leg. Bill Hannis, graying and leathery, leaned against a hitching post and kept his arms casually folded upon his chest.

"You had better not push my play, sonny," said Hannis in a voice of reasonable caution. "What you're asking for is plain murder."

"I'll carry my end of this," Johnnie Ellsworth asserted. "If you're man enough to lift yours."

Bill Hannis shook his head. "I've carried mine a considerable ways a'ready. Hell, I was a deputy under Wyatt Earp at Dodge. I rode my point in the posse that fogged down Professor Billy Cates. I was at Horse Creek, and Injun Hole. This is *my* game you're asking cards in, sonny."

Johnnie said, "Your reputation don't scare me worth a hoot, mister. All I'm asking is, if you've got the sand to go for your gun."

Mary McBride saw, with grateful relief, that Mr. Bill Hannis wasn't wearing any gun. The black-butted Colt, in its shoulder-rigged holster, dangled from a hitching post. A smile broke whitely across the weathered tan of his face, and he said:

"If it comes to reputation, I'll admit to taking pride in mine. It wasn't made shooting drunks, or greenhorn kids. Such killing as I've done was in a fair fighting way, man to man, and no favors taken. I never downed a man yet that didn't have his even, fifty-fifty chance with me, and I don't aim to change now. No," said Bill Hannis, stepping conclusively into the street, "you can't talk me into murdering you, sonny."

"You yellow-livered coyote—!"

Hannis said, "You ain't drunk 'r crazy enough to shoot an unarmed man in the back, are you?" and slouched through the ankle depth of dust toward the stage. Mary McBride stared after the wide target of his shoulders, looked at Johnnie Ellsworth in dread. The nineteen year old's face wore a sneer of laughter.

"Polecat!" the youth yelled. "Any skunk can save his hide the way you're doing, Hannis!"

"Oh, the fool!" said Mary McBride, with a warm mist in her eyes. "I never saw anything so brave, ever."

Johnnie Ellsworth released a rooster's crow of derision. The hotel man said, "Bill Hannis ain't going to take it. He can't be treed this way by nobody—not and ride shotgun on this run."

"That silly, drunken boy—," the girl began.

"He ain't too young to rob a stage, if he can buffalo the guard. If he gits away with this he'll have a rep an' keep on bein' bad 'till he's killed. Billy the Kid 'r Sam Bass wasn't any older when they started. . . . Wait, what's he up to now?"

HANNIS, returning from the stage, brought with him the driver's heavy leather, almost elbow-length gauntlets. One he carried tucked under his left arm; the other, he slapped against his leg as he walked.

Mary McBride was suddenly afraid of what she saw in Mr. Bill Hannis's face.

He stopped in front of Johnnie Ellsworth. "If you're bound and determined you want a killin' here, all right, you'll get a killin' . . . . But fair and square, fifty-fifty, like I said. I'll fight you the way Professor Billy Cates killed Crippled Smith at Abilene in '71. . . . Stick your gun down in this glove."

The nineteen-year-old hesitated. He looked sobered and, Mary McBride thought, startled by the unusual request.

Hannis said roughly, "Put up or crawl down, kid!"

Johnnie Ellsworth stared in brief indecision at his gun. Its pearl handle glinted bravely in his fingers. "I'll see your play," he agreed, and dropped his gun into the big gauntlet.

Bill Hannis laid the gloves beside the hitching post. He needed both hands to break open his black Colt, empty its cylinder, and toss aside the cartridges. He knelt with his back to the youth. Mary McBride, watching breathlessly, saw the gun disappear into its gauntlet. Hannis, as he got up, held both gloves closely hugged to his chest.

Unhurriedly, he put down the gauntlets again—in the middle of the square, now, and twenty measured paces apart. Having done so, he came back to Johnnie Ellsworth.

"Make your guess, sonny. I'll take what's left."

Johnnie had turned a degree pale. He swallowed, "Wait." The coin winked brightly in the sunlight. He caught it on his palm, looked carefully, and said: "Heads. The south gun."

"Go to it," Bill Hannis told him.

Johnnie Ellsworth moved out into the plaza. Mary McBride saw that he kept his face turned across his shoulder, watching Bill Hannis. She looked at the older man, unperturbedly trudging toward the north gun. Mr. Hannis's assurance told her that gun was, beyond any question, the loaded one.

It told Johnnie Ellsworth the same thing. Johnnie stumbled. He could command the instant-swift courage for a fast draw. It was not in him to approach death in this deliberate and methodical, drawn-out design. He wasn't halfway out to the middle of the square when he whirled, ran in front of Hannis to the north glove.

"I changed my guess!" Johnnie Ellsworth cried. "You never said I couldn't if I—" and stopped, aghast.

Hannis was standing over the south glove, smiling. "I'm satisfied with what's left," the old gun-fighter said.

Mary McBride could not help feeling sorry for the boy. It came over him, clearly for all to see, that he'd been tricked and betrayed by his own breaking nerves.

"Hold on," Johnnie faltered. "I—I guess—"

Hannis came toward him. "Make up your mind then." The implacable smile stayed on his lips.

Johnnie Ellsworth hesitated again; whipped down swiftly, and jerked the gun from the gauntlet at his feet. For a moment, numbly, he stared at the black-butted Colt. Then his nineteen-year-old knees buckled and he slid down in a dead faint.

Waiting for the stage to pull around the square, Mary McBride shivered in the sunlight. "If he'd picked up the other glove—!"

Bill Hannis grinned and shook out the other glove. It also held a black-butted gun. "When I went to the stage, ma'm, I unloaded my spare six-shooter and it was in one glove all the time. On my knees I slid his out of t'other an' put mine in its place. His is still here scuffed down in the dust but I reckon he don't put so much value on it now."

THE CAMP-FIRE

Where readers, writers and adventurers meet

AS the basis of "The Brave Man of Kigoma," Brian O'Brien used his own experiences in Africa and a little known but true and astonishing epic of naval enterprise in desert, jungle and mountains, far from where any sailor would seem to belong.

I went to Cameroons, Afrique Occidentale Francaise, immediately after the last war. Traded for some time for rubber, ivory, ebony, palm oils, etc. Joined French exploitation company (sort of charter company) to verify trade routes, establish trading stations, check boundaries between Cameroons—Spanish Guinea and Gaboon. Managed to keep myself busy by interfering with turbulent border chiefs (until they chased me out with poisoned arrows), shooting elephant, gorilla and buffalo.

I became respectable in 1921 and joined the British Colonial Service as Transport Officer for the Nigerian Railway Construction. Eventually became bored. Came home, wandered over Europe and came to the United States ten years ago. Have not been bored since.

"The Brave Man of Kigoma" is written around one of the lesser known naval exploits of the last war. The events described actually took place without loss of a single man. The only casualty was to a junior naval officer who, threatened by a native prisoner, punched him in the mouth and had to have a finger amputated as a result.

"CHOICE of Weapons" brings another new author into our Writers' Brigade—Dale Clark. Familiar elsewhere, this is his first story with us, and we look for more. He says:

Born, 1905, of Mid-Western folk; raised in a small town; turned to the farm to earn the money with which to turn to the city. Have been a school-teacher, a lumberyard worker, reporter, special investigator (private detective to you), house-to-house peddler, and twice an editor—but always, in ambition, anyway, a writer. The motivation is just as simple. I was a bookish kid because I was too spindling to be a baseball kid; thus I got an early feel for the written word in me. Ex-

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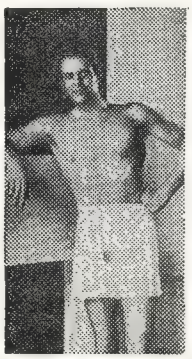

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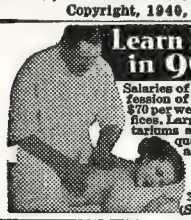

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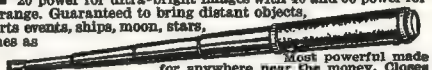

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citing incidents have been few and far between. . . . Anyway, I suspect the *important* adventures in a writer's life are the ones that never happened to him. (So the fellow is impelled to make them happen on paper!) I live at present in South California; am bigamously wedded to a wife and a typewriter, and desert both for the tennis racquet and the camera. My published words run to several million, and have appeared in *Collier's*, *Liberty*, *This Week* and many other magazines. This is my first appearance in *Adventure* but I hope it won't be the last.

IT'S a rare day when a naval officer writes and dedicates a poem to a marine and army officer, but we have one at hand. It's a heartfelt job, and if the verse bumps around a bit and yaws kind of wildly on the way down wind, you may lay that to the fact that it's written about a boat that one of them sold to the other. We're indebted to Herbert R. Smith, Capt. U. S. Army, Rtd., who writes from Tacoma, Wash.

I have read *Adventure* since it was first published. I am enclosing a bit written by a retired naval officer friend of mine.

I lived on a forty-foot ketch for a couple of years, then sold it to him. He got tired of the endless scrubbing and painting and sold it to another man, and then wrote the enclosed verse and sent it to me. As I had served in both the Army and Marines you can readily see why he took a dig at me.

If you care to publish it, hop to it.

THE SOJER-MARINE 'ND THE BIT OF A BOAT

From the north west he came; in a Bit of a boat.
There was hair on his chest that curled up to his throat,
And the blue of his chin marked the line of a jaw,
That fit to a T his massive right paw;
This held to the wheel; where he squat as he scowled
At the lumpy green seas—kicked by wind that still howled,
While south, his fist held her. Some Nut he would find
Who this Bit of a boat would lift off of his mind;

Who'd take up this burden of strain'n one's guts,
By pullin', 'nd haulin', 'nd screwin' up nuts.
And Lo! On a dock, in a harbor serene,
Me bold Laddie-Buck of a once tough marine
Gave a squint of an eye that was wicked with glee;
For he'd spotted the Nut; aye, the poor Nut was me.
Then he swung to the dock—(with an anchor off shore)
Where he slung up a sign, 'twixt his mizzen 'nd fore,
Which the same reads: For sale—'nd her name's Bonaroo—
But if I'd known me onions—plus one look at the crew,
'Twould have kept me from boardin'—with soul pure 'nd free
And that second green swizzle, he'd not tucked in me;
For I'm tellin' you straight, that the first thing I knew,
I'd a Bit of a boat—and *I* was the crew.
Then comes the damn haulin' 'nd bustin' of guts,
The swabbin', the scrubbin', and settin' up nuts;
While that bloody ex-sojer—that one time marine
(A worse combination there never was seen)
He ships on a Packard, he chirps: "Toodle-oo
I'll be seein' you Shorty—be good to the crew."
So I 'vast heavin' anchor, to watch him glide forth,
With a wheel that he swivels, to lay his dust north;
And I hear from him later; he's diggin' fer gold;
Hell—I'm diggin' me-self; fer I'm scrubbin' the hold.
'nd when I'm not scrubbin', I'm splicin' of rope;
'nd when I'm not splicin', I'm mixin' more soap
To do some more scrubbin'; she's hell to keep clean,
This legacy left by that bloody marine,
Who sojered with Pershin'; who'd slipped me the yoke;
Believe me, no Sailor is safe with that bloke.
But Ah! comes the day when *I* spot a Nut!
I'm half up the mizzen, a strainin' a gut
He boards me to starboard; he flashes a check;
I kiss the damn paint-brush 'nd hit for the deck.
So ends me hard labor. I heave me a sigh.
Tho me ligaments pain me, me spirit's fair high.
But I'll miss the old Bonny, this Bit of a boat,
Which stiffened me muscles—which loosened me goat.
And now that it's peaceful, 'nd once more serene,
I find me-self thinkin' of the sojer-marine,
And the African swizzles we gulped with our chow;
What in hell is he doin'; where the hell is he now?

NOW and again we like to go out of our way at Camp-Fire and give notice to a good book just written by an *Ask Adventure* expert or one of our regular writers.

A number of you have written to ask if Kathrene Pinkerton is the wife of author Robert E. Pinkerton. She is. The books in question are two she wrote in the last year, "Wilderness Wife" and "Three's A Crew," both published by Carrick and Evans.

"Wilderness Wife" was reprinted in a condensed version in *Reader's Digest.* This book tells how Robert and Kathrene Pinkerton went into the Canadian wilderness, found their lake, built their cabin miles of canoe travel from the nearest settlement, and Robert set out to learn the art of writing stories.

It's a fine picture of creating a home by means of an axe, and creating a livelihood by the will to learn and a strong love of the outdoors.

"Three's a Crew" tells of the adventures of this writing couple and their daughter some years later after they went to the West Coast, and settled restlessly in various towns, until Robert began to spend much time pacing the waterfront and staring at the sea. They got a boat, and for seven years lived along the coast from Seattle to Alaska. They did the same kind of pioneering job here that they had done in the wilderness.

We recommend both books without reservation to the kind of people who like adventure, outdoor independence and who read this magazine.

H. B.

ASK ADVENTURE

Information you can't get elsewhere

A BLOWGUN for your den.

Request:—I'd like to get a blowgun for my den, a blowgun of the type used by the South American Indians. Can you give me any information as to possible sources of supply and probable price? Naturally I'd rather purchase one in the States if I could.

If there are any imitations in this country, I'd appreciate information about them.

—A. Simmons, Bronx, N. Y.

Reply by Mr. Edgar Young:—There are several sorts of blowguns used in South America by Indians. The most common one is made of chontawood, the hard, glassy wood of the chonta palm. A piece the relative size of the proposed gun is roughly shaped, then split, each half grooved with the lower jawbone and teeth of a piranha fish (so-called "cannibal fish"), then the long cylinder is wrapped with fiber treated with rubber sap, the rough bore made by the rejoining of the two channels made circular and polished by running the gun back and forth on a string upon which a wad of fiber dipped in wet sand is bound, until it is round and smooth. Then a mouthpiece is fitted to the end. Darts are fashioned by using the ribs of certain other palm leaves which are about the size of wheat straws and some nine or ten inches long. A wad of raw cotton is affixed at one end for compression and the other treated with poison from saps of certain plants and roots. The guns range in length from five to ten feet long and some Indians are quite proficient with them.

This is the main type of blowgun of the Amazon basin, other types being made of bamboo, of pithy woods from which the pith is expelled by force and the interior polished, and some shorter ones made from the stalks of weedlike plants.

There are several of these guns in New York public and private museums I remember. The buying of one will perhaps be troublesome. You would probably have to approach the matter in three or more ways in order to guarantee results: first, I would go to the various public museums, and inquire of the men in charge if they know where such guns may be procured and at about what price; second, I would insert an ad in the Sunday papers and hope to contact someone who has a gun or so on hand; third,

(Continued on page 121)

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29x4.75-20	2.50	1.25
29x5.00-19	2.85	1.25
30x5.00-20	2.85	1.25
5.25-17	2.90	1.35
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.35
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.35
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.35
31x5.25-21	3.25	1.35
5.50-17	3.35	1.40
29x5.50-18	3.35	1.40
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.45
6.00-17	3.40	1.40
29x6.00-18	3.40	1.40
31x6.00-19	3.40	1.45
32x6.00-20	3.45	1.55
33x6.00-21	3.65	1.55
32x6.50-20	3.75	1.75
6.00-16	3.75	1.45

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32x4	2.95	1.25
33x4	2.95	1.25
34x4	3.25	1.35
32x4½	3.35	1.45

Size	Tires	Tubes
33x4½	$3.45	$1.45
34x4½	3.45	1.45
30x5	3.65	1.65
33x5	3.75	1.75
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F. R. Buckley writes another adventure of Captain of the Guard Caradosso. Georges Surdez writes a companion yarn to the one in this issue—the Frenchman fighting again with the old enemy in the old field where his father and grandfather battled.

Bertrand W. Sinclair and the salmon trollers, Paul Annixter and an African big game story and others in

Adventure 15c

— ON SALE SEPT. 10th —

(Continued from page 118)

I would get some such firm as Francis Bannerman to try to obtain one for me on commission; fourth, the private museums will sometimes sell such curiosities direct to the public.

The slower method would be to go to the public library and consult the Department of Commerce Directory of Latin America and get the names of merchants in Iquitos, Peru; Para, Brazil; Manaos, Brazil; Quito, Ecuador; La Paz, Bolivia; and send such merchants a letter of inquiry. Second, write Pan American Union, Washington, D.C., for the names of consular agents in the various countries and write these people direct asking if they could obtain one for you; third, by commissioning some purser or employe on one of the ships leaving New York for trips along the S.A. east coast to buy and bring back one or more of the guns.

You can get quite a bit of information about these guns by reading various exploration books in the public library. Argot Lange's "In the Amazon Jungle" and DeGraff's "Among the Head Hunters" are both quite interesting and there are others that are worth casual or intense perusal.

There is a museum in Prospect Park, Brooklyn, where I have seen not only blowguns from South America but also two dried heads from the upper Amazon.

I know of no one making imitation blowguns.

BLADES from ancient forges.

Request:—Do you know the approximate date of the Damascus blades? When did they become known for their excellence of workmanship and material? Was Damascus the place of manufacture or the distributing point for a large area? How can the excellence of the Damascus steel be accounted for since the smiths lacked both the knowledge of chemical analysis and must have used rather primitive methods of smelting. As I understand it, using wood for fuel when smelting causes a large percentage of carbon in the steel, and that is supposed to make the metal more brittle. Yet none of the old famous blades were that, neither Toledo, nor Damascus, nor Milan. Do you think history has exaggerated the excellence of these blades?

Do you think the old swords could be bent double without injury? I've heard that they were shipped coiled like a watch spring and that they straightened out immediately they were removed from their shipping containers.

—Ralph Moore, Colorado Springs, Colo.

Reply by Captain R. E. Gardner:—Damascus is recognized as the point of origin of the steel of that name. However the most famous of the Damascus blades were produced at Ispanhan, Khorasan and Shiraz in Persia. Assad Ullah of Ispanhan, circa 1600, was the most celebrated of the Persian bladesmiths.

I have yet to see the blade which could be flexed—point to hilt. The virtue of a thrusting weapon is its resiliency rather than flexibility. As you noted in your letter, a high carbon content reduces the amount of flex without fracture.

Dr. Perry in his "Metallurgy-Iron and Steel" states in part "The damask portion is due to the difference in coloration resulting from the action of acids on iron and steel. The surface of the former being left with a metallic tissue and that of the steel being left coated with a black, firmly adherent carbonaceous residue. By suitably piling together bars of iron and steel, welding them, and then drawing them out under hammer, patterns of various kinds are produced just as is done in the case of glass."

HELL on earth in Idaho.

Request:—I'd appreciate information on gold prospecting in the Craters of the Moon portion of Idaho. How did this district get its name, and how was it formed?

—J. A. Blumette, Linden, Calif.

Reply by Mr. Victor Shaw:—Speaking geologically, the area in southeastern Idaho now known as "Craters of the Moon", has a vast surface flow of lavas which cover portions of four counties—Blaine, Bingham, Minnidoka and Cassia, and total of about seventy-five to eighty miles wide on its northern end with some one hundred-twenty miles running southward into Cassia County. This area is part of a great plateau which is about six thousand feet above sea level and is a good example of the various places called popularly, "the land that God forgot".

This region can be reached by auto from town of Arco, some dozen miles on highway No. 22, an improved road between Arco and Shoshone. It can also be reached by auto from Shoshone, about sixty-five miles southwest, or from Picabo about forty miles, Picabo being eighteen miles southeast of Hailey on U.S. 93. Arco is sixty-two miles northwest of Blackfoot, on the Snake River. Going in from Arco there is a dim trail into the area for some eight to ten miles, after that —nothing, but a fantastic contorted expanse of obsidian and countless other types of lava

twisted into queer rope-like formations, sputter bubbles, volcanic craters, bottomless water holes and an unending array of curious shapes resembling all sorts of beasts and birds colored with all hues of the rainbow. It is said to have been discovered some years ago by a man named Limbert, and due to his efforts coupled with a preliminary exploration by the National Geographic Society it was set aside by Washington as a National Park. There is no agricultural possibility in the whole region. So far as minerals are concerned, there may be such as might be of value to collectors, but probably none for commercial uses.

In this respect, it more or less resembles the vast lava flow in south-central Oregon and Modoc and Lassen counties of northeastern California, except that in this region just named the lava is covered by a substantial depth of soil, which supports a normal growth of grass, brush and timber, that serves as a cover protection for numerous rivers and lakes. Nevertheless, so deep is the lava flow that there is no use to prospect there for minerals, since the rocks which form them are buried too deeply. The same is true of the Idaho lava flow in question, but being in desert country it is merely a baked, barren country like Dante's Inferno. It was obviously cooled instantly while liquid, hot and seething, perhaps when the Ice Age began; which is said by scientists to have had its birth in the wink of an eyelash, when the earth was tipped 23½° in the plane of the ecliptic, which is thought to be caused by some vast solar disturbance.

It is doubtful if any geologists have yet investigated this region, at least to any extent. One party about 1926-27 penetrated it for around thirty miles afoot, going in from Arco, and during that ten day hike they *wore out* new boots soled by hobnails and metal cleats. There were nine in this party, all carrying heavy back-packs.

In any case, you'd better forget prospecting in this area.

DONEGAN WIGGINS and the third degree.

Request:—I trust you'll pardon me because I'm about to ask a lot of questions for the price of an airmail stamp, but I'll list them to make answering easier, and will appreciate any information you can give me.

1. What was the general type (most in use) of infantry rifle used by the Union Forces in the Civil War?
2. What was its effective range?
3. What was the rate of fire per minute for a trained man?
4. How was the cartridge made?
5. What was the loading process?
6. Was the bullet round or conical?
7. What was the weight of the piece?
8. What was its length?
9. What carbines were used in the Union cavalry?
10. Which were repeaters?
11. To what extent was the cavalry armed with repeaters?
12. Did any or all of these repeaters use brass cartridge case ammunition?
13. What was their respective magazine capacity?
14. I have heard that some five years before the war—presumably about 1856—Colt's military rifle with a revolving cylinder was tried out by a board of officers who agreed upon its reliability and accuracy. However, they refused to recommend its adoption by the army on the ground that the existing weapon met all practical purposes and that the ammunition expenditure of the Colt repeater in action would be too great. Can you tell me whether this story has a basis in fact?
15. What was the "Minie ball"?
16. What distinguished it from other s.a. ammunition?
17. Where did the name come from?
18. I understand that because of the great variety of firearms, many of them brought from the owner's home, used in the C.S.A. forces, there was little uniformity of weapon. Was this overcome after the first year or so of the war, possibly as the result of captures of U.S. ordnance?
19. I gather from published descriptions that the new Garand rifle of the U.S. Army cannot fire in "bursts", but is "automatic" only in the ejection of the cartridge case and the loading of a fresh shell . . . that is, automatic in the same sense as an automatic pistol. In other words it is not an automatic rifle such as the Browning, etc. Am I correct?
20. Does any American manufacturer make a truly "automatic" pistol, capable of firing in bursts so long as the magazine contains shells and the trigger is held down? I mean a weapon such as that described as having been used in the assassination of King Alexander of Servia (Jugoslavia)? My understanding is that no manufacturer turns out such weapons, but that ordinary automatics can be remodeled by competent gunsmiths to this end. Am I correct?

Many thanks.

—Paul Benton, Philadelphia, Pa.

Reply by Mr. Donegan Wiggins:—I'll gladly do for you what I can, as requested in Ask Adventure letter.

1st. The regulation Infantry arm of the majority of the Union Infantry was the .58 caliber muzzleloading Springfield rifle, made by different contractors as well as the Government, with open sights, bayonet, and sling strap. They seem to have used the sling merely for the purpose of carrying the rifle.

2nd. Against infantry, cavalry, or a battery, I think the .58 Springfield would have been effective for 600 yards, or under the best conditions, possibly to 800.

3rd. Two shots a minute would have been a good rate of fire.

4th. The cartridge was a tube of heavy paper, with the ball enclosed at one end, and the powder charge in the other, the end of the cartridge being tied shut, and the outside greased with tallow. I understand the cartridges were put up in paper packets of ten each.

5th. In loading, the soldier drew the ramrod, took a cartridge from his beltpouch, BIT the paper end off, poured the powder down the barrel, and rammed home the Minie ball after which he capped the nipple, (unless he had the Maynard primer tape device on the lock), and then he was ready to shoot.

6th. The rifles, save a few old ones used early in the war, with the bullet and buckshot load, used a hollowbase conical bullet, called the Minie Ball, of pure lead;

7th. The rifle weighed about ten pounds, although there may be a bit of variation;

8th. Sawyer gives its length as 4′1½″; it was a rather slender looking arm;

9th. The Union Army used Springfield muzzleloading carbines, and a flock of others in breechloading types, Sharp, Warner, Smith, Spencer, Triplett & Scott, Gwin, Colt revolving, Cosmopolitan, Sharp & Hankins, and I cannot imagine just how many others.

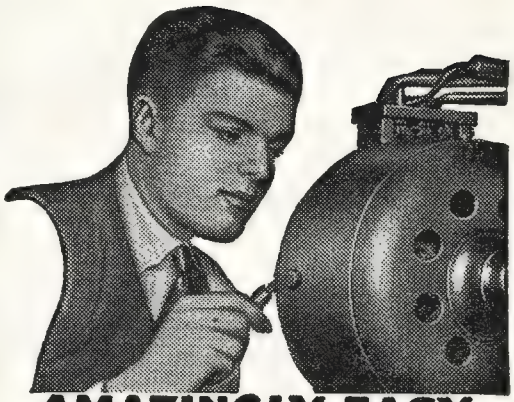
10th. I recall the Henry rifle, and the Spencer, Scott & Tripplet, and Ball repeating carbines as having been Union equipment in the cavalry.

11th. I judge the majority of the cavalry had repeating carbines by 1865; many bought Henry rifles from their own funds, as the Government refused to purchase them, they were the best repeater of their day.

12th. These carbines used rimfire copper cartridge cases, and I know of no brass cases until in the Seventies;

13th. Henry used sixteen cartridges in the magazine, the rest seem to have been seven shot arms, like the Spencer;

14th. The refusal of the Board was due



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to fact of possible exhaustion of ammunition in the case of the Spencer repeater, originally, not of the Colt revolver rifle.

15th. The Minie Ball was the bullet used in the British Enfields, brought in for the Union troops, and by blockade runners for the Confederates in .577 caliber, as well as in our own .58 Springfields. A hollow base lead bullet, conical with grooves, and while it slid down the bore easily in loading, due to being sub-caliber, upon firing the rifle, the gases of the powder charge expanded the follow base to take the rifling well, and make it gas tight. It was invented by Colonel Minie, of the French Army, about 1846.

16th. It was more accurate and deadly than other muzzleloading military projectiles;

17th. See the mention of Colonel Minie.

18th. The Confederates used any arms they could get, trying to stay close to the .577 or .58 calibers, to conform with ammunition captured from the Union forces.

19th. The new Garand is not an automatic arm, but fires one shot to a trigger pull only;

20th. No full automatic pistol is made in America, nor can any be successfully altered.

DON'T play the shark game.

Request:—Please tell me what you can of the shark fishing industry. Is it possible to make a living provided one has the capital for a boat, nets, etc.? What is the average income per week?

—Alan Lunak, Chicago, Ill.

Reply by Mr. C. Blackburn Miller:—Frankly, I do not consider the venture worth the investment at this time. I was recently in Florida near Key West which was at one time the scene of considerable commercial shark fishing. Now, however, the firms on the Key have discontinued the purchasing of hides, and the oil, once in great demand, is bringing as little as twenty cents a gallon.

The overhead is considerable. The floating nets are expensive and are continually being torn. A suitable base has to be provided where men are retained as skinners and where the oil can be tried out.

In many instances when a base has been erected the sharks move on to some other locality.

A motor craft is necessary with sufficient beam to permit free operation on her decks and you would have to have the services of at least two men on board.

I am of the opinion that the California coast is superior to the Florida coast for the reason that there are more markets in San Francisco for the hides, fins and oil.

HOW to start a wrestling club.

Request:—I am anxious to start a wrestling club in school. Can you give me a few hints about that? What books would be good for the club to have?

—Walter Exan, Detroit, Ill.

Reply by Mr. Murl Thrush:—In starting a wrestling club you must consider the following items:—mats, mat covers, protective mats, uniforms, sanitation, proper leadership, interest among the boys, conditioning, and public support.

The larger the mat space the safer the sport but if your area is limited it would be possible to get by with an 18′ by 18′ mat and a rubberized or canvas cover. The rubberized cover is more expensive but it lasts longer and can be sterilized from day to day. Most any of the wholesale sporting goods stores can give you information as to the price. If you already have a large number of gym mats you can lace them together and envelope them in the cover. Protective mats on the side will prevent accidents.

An ordinary cotton sweat suit makes a good practice uniform and aids in the prevention of infections. A very light shoe is the best type for wrestling. Long worsted tights can be bought for five dollars. Swimming shorts and basketball knee pads also makes an adequate uniform for competition.

The coach should start the boys off from the beginning by emphasizing the proper rules and regulations as set up by the National A. A. U. Committee or the National Intercollegiate Wrestling Association. You can obtain rule books from an A. G. Spaulding Sporting Goods store.

If you are not familiar with the different holds, counters, and maneuvers it would be wise for you to take a few lessons from somebody who has had at least five years of college and amateur wrestling experience. There are two very good wrestling books recently published that will aid you after you learn the fundamentals from an instructor. The books are—"Wrestling" by E. C. Gallaghen, Okla. A. M. College and "Wrestling Fundamentals" by Austin Bishop, coach of wrestling at the University of Pennsylvania.

Long distance running along with mat work is essential if the boys are to get in the best of shape. They should start with the half mile and work up to two miles. It is well to start conditioning about three months before opening the competitive season. Pick out the boys who are not afraid of personal contact and keep them in their own weight division. A boy who is always getting licked soon loses interest.

AUTO camping in the Great Smokies.

Request:—I would greatly appreciate any information that you could give me on the following subjects: Camping equipment to have for two, my wife and myself; selecting campsites, precautions.

Camping in and around the Great Smokies, carrying my supplies by automobile with a light trailer attached.

Any hints for comfort that can be handily applied to campers who are not on one night stands, but stay in one site as long as they wish.

I know something of the country, being raised up on a Georgia farm, but I have been away from it for many years, and have lost contact with the outdoors. I have traveled over most of the world except the U. S. and now that I am ready to retire I want to see what it is like.

The trip I had planned would take me by way of Memphis through Tennessee and North Carolina turning south through South Carolina, Georgia, Florida and back through Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana. My future plans will be based on your recommendations.

Clayton Lewis, Pearl Harbor, T. H.

Reply by Mr. Paul M. Fink:—Such a leisurely trip as you have in mind would be entirely feasible and most enjoyable. The months of August, September and October would be the best, as giving the most settled weather. Keeping in the mountain regions in August and the lower country later will let you escape the extremities of weather, both hot and cold.

Before routing your trip secure a copy of the large map, Recreational Areas of the U. S., issued by the National Park Service, Washington, price of which, as I recall, is 25c. This shows the location of all National and State recreational spots, and the descriptive matter tells which of the national areas are adapted to camping. In the most of these camp sites are set aside for visitors like yourself, with protection and some few facilities. In the most of them one is limited to a stay of two weeks at one time. In the Great Smokies there are two beautiful locations, one on either side of the State line, and from then you can make any number of day trips, either by car or afoot.

You say you plan to use a light trailer, and stay some time at each suitable place. For this I would get one of the tents called vari-

(Continued on page 127)

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ASK ADVENTURE

(Continued from page 125)

ously umbrella, marquee or auto, size 10x10, waterproofed material. This you can secure from either Sears-Roebuck or Montgomery Ward, or write to David T. Abercrombie Co. 811 Broadway, New York, for their catalog. Use single folding cots, or a folding double spring bed, with pad.

Better have at least four wool blankets, for the nights in the mountains get chilly, even in summer.

Many of the camp grounds have individual stone fireplaces, and fuel is supplied, but at other places you will find that you can do better cooking with a folding gasoline stove than by trying to rustle your own firewood. Get a model with folding legs. Also have a folding table and two or three camp chairs.

Far be it from me to advise any lady what cooking utensils to use, so we will leave the selection of them and the table furniture to Mrs. Lewis.

A gallon thermos jug, a folding water-bucket, small axe, small shovel (entrenching tool answers the purpose,) first aid and repair kits, mosquito nets, fly dope, gasoline lantern, ball of heavy twine and coil of light rope, handful of assorted nails and tacks, all will find a use.

Take along your fishing tackle, both fly and bait, if you are a devotee of that sport.

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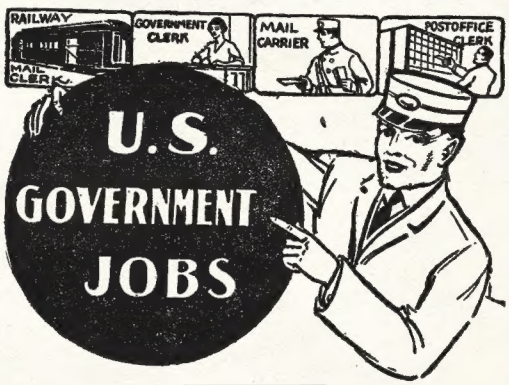

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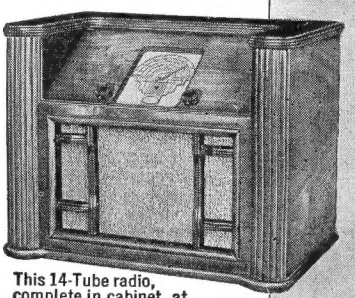

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